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## Perceptions and Realities of the Irish Republican Army During the Second World War

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The University of Southern Mississippi

PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES OF THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY

DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

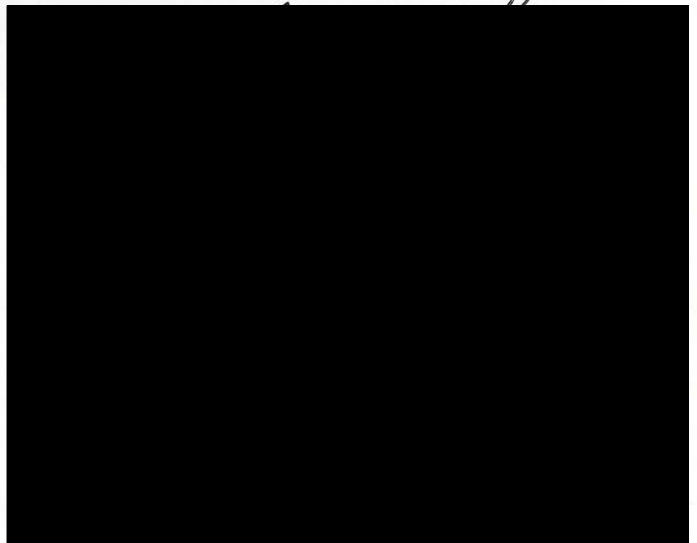
by

L.B. Wilson III

A Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

### PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES OF THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by L. B. Wilson III

August 2012

This thesis investigates the British and German perception of the IRA and claims that the organization represented an insurmountable obstacle to the progress of both German intelligence and British counter-intelligence. The IRA was also the primary contributor to the political troubles of Irish neutrality during World War II. It examines the perceived threat of the IRA in the minds of the Irish Prime Minister Eamon de Valera and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and those ministers' respective governments. The thesis looks at official debates in the British Parliament and the Irish Dail as well as interwar newspapers and official records. Additionally, the thesis consults the Abwehr II War Diary to compare the Axis interest in the IRA as a means by which to prepare an amphibious assault on Britain through Ireland. By analyzing intelligence records, arrest records, and correspondences to and from Eire during the war, this research lends insight into the real military potential of the IRA and compares that potential to the perceived threat of international terrorism in the 1940s.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Popular history of the Second World War revolves around major encounters between gargantuan elements such as the Fifth Fleet or the Red Army or the *Einsatzgruppen*. The subversive war for information, fought by spies and saboteurs, is often and understandably overlooked. These early spies wrestled with rapidly developing communications technologies to protect the secrets and agendas of their respective states and to undermine their enemies. One of the most important battlefields for this World War II conflict of subversion was Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Its geographic importance to the Germans and its virtually indefensible border with Great Britain made the neutral republic an ideal staging ground for Abwehr<sup>2</sup> spies and the Secret Intelligence Service's (SIS) counter-intelligence operations. A level of incompetence bordering on buffoonery largely characterizes the World War II history of both organizations.<sup>3</sup> However, the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) interactions with groups on both sides of the conflict have been largely overlooked. The marginalization of the IRA contribution to Eire's World War II history is unfortunate because the organization played a central role in the intelligence considerations of the German Abwehr, the British SIS, and the Irish government. A more thorough consideration of the IRA's actions, its perceived power, and its actual power adds important nuance to the history of the unseen war for intelligence between Britain and Germany. Even more importantly, the IRA in World

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<sup>1</sup> To delineate the island correctly, "Eire" will be used to designate the 26 southern counties of Ireland, which, from 1921 to 1937 was known as The Irish Free State, from 1937-49 was called Eire, and from 1949 until this writing is called the Republic of Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> Abwehr II is the division of German Intelligence during the Second World War that was concerned with sabotage.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the weakness of the early iterations of SIS, see F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For Abwehr II's failures, see Enno Stephan, *Spies in Ireland*. trans. Arthur Davidson (London: Macdonald & Co., 1963).

War II represents a variety of ways in which neutral, relatively weak states can impose their will upon the interests of drastically more powerful belligerent nations. That the IRA did not actually represent the Irish state during WWII is an important point here. Further, investigation on this point will demonstrate how asymmetrical warfare in the form of IRA terrorism had a larger impact on the conduct of the Second World War than has previously been considered.

This thesis will show that the British and German perception of The IRA represented an insurmountable obstacle to the progress of German intelligence, to British counter-intelligence, and was the primary contributor to the political troubles of Irish neutrality during World War II. It will examine the perceived threat of the IRA in the minds of the de Valera<sup>4</sup> and Churchill governments separately by looking at official debates in the British Parliament and the Irish Dail<sup>5</sup> as well as by investigating interwar newspapers and official records. Additionally, the thesis will consult the Abwehr II War Diary to compare the Axis interest in the IRA as a means by which to prepare an amphibious assault on Britain through Ireland. Finally, the thesis analyzes intelligence records, arrest records, and correspondences to and from Eire during the war to evaluate the real military potential of the IRA.

The issue of image and reality is an important one to this thesis. It should be reemphasized that the IRA represented a perceived threat. This thesis argues that the actual threat represented by the organization was ultimately negligible, for reasons demonstrated later. The reactions, the deployment of soldiers, materiel, and the use of political capital by Britain, the U.S., and Germany as a result of this perceived threat, is

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<sup>4</sup> The Free State's Prime Minister, referred to in this thesis by his Irish title, Taoiseach.

<sup>5</sup> Irish term for the Free State Parliament.

the dimension of the story that concerns this thesis. A collision of cultural and social factors with the Second World War's military tension and feeling of emergency cause the U.K.'s decision makers to act rashly. Longstanding racial and cultural tensions between the U.K. and the Irish informs many of Churchill's decisions during the war, as does the Prime Minister's own frustrating experiences in the interwar years as First Lord of the Admiralty when he failed to secure enough War Cabinet support to prevent the return of the ports at Cobh, Berehaven, and Lough Swilly to the Free State. None of these things, the stereotypical racial tensions between Britain and Ireland, the Prime Minister's personal irritation with the Free State, nor the IRA's own propaganda, were specifically military considerations. They all, however, informed the military decisions made by each party involved in Irish neutrality in the Second World War.

As an insurgent, paramilitary organization, the IRA has several inherent challenges for scholars. First, the clandestine nature of the organization inhibits a great deal of the work that traditional military historians might do. Locating certain IRA units in space and time, particularly during the de Valera years, is a daunting task. During the interwar period, de Valera took up a crusade against the IRA in Eire; the result was bad news and good news for historians. The bad news was that much of the IRA propaganda and correspondence was seized, censored, or both. As of this writing, the Irish government has not yet released many these documents, and that has crippled much of the existing IRA historiography. The good news, however, is that the crusade against the IRA was assigned to the G2, Eire's military intelligence directorate. These operatives, agents, and officers interned hundreds of IRA soldiers and captains during the war, and those arrest records are available. By looking at the arrest records, confessions, and



police reports of the interned IRA, this thesis will present a better picture of the composition, location, and operations of the IRA during the Second World War. These records will also show the limited capabilities of the IRA to achieve the goals of the *Abwehr* or the fears of the SIS.

For the impact of IRA operations, this thesis will look to the British War Cabinet, the Reports to the Taoiseach, and to the U.K. Public Records Office's *Haller Report*. The most important operations to the arguments presented here received little or no attention in newspapers due to wartime censorship, but the official reports reflect the perceived threat of IRA activities and the level of popular and official support that the IRA received in Germany and in Britain. This approach will develop the current historiography on the IRA by considering the popular and the political fear of the IRA and comparing that fear to the success and failure of the organization's terror bombing campaigns.

The history of the interwar IRA is an underdeveloped field. However, as intelligence history<sup>6</sup> has become more popular since the end of the Cold War and with the subsequent opening of closed intelligence files, material on the IRA has crept its way back into scholarly purview. Writings on Irish nationalism and on Irish independence are abundant, and while these histories would be remiss without mention of their more militant cousins, the IRA receives little treatment in many of the narrative histories of twentieth century Ireland. What is available for study on the IRA is a spotty and largely

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<sup>6</sup> For clarity, intelligence history, as a discipline, investigates the operations, strategies, and experiences of intelligence services as a wing of military history. It is not to be confused with intellectual history, which investigates changes in paradigms over time.

politicized body of work.<sup>7</sup> The politicization of IRA scholarship results from the fact that IRA activities have never left the field of current events. Journalists, then, have been regularly looked to for their perspectives on the IRA and its contribution to history. IRA histories tend to follow three trends: those that marginalize the role IRA violence in the creation of the Irish state, those who decry it as counter-productive, and those who overstate the impact of republican violence on politics, society, culture, and warfare. Each of these approaches paints an incomplete picture of the IRA and its impact on twentieth century Ireland and all of them would be well served to look at IRA terrorism as a form of unconventional warfare. Each of them also offers an important perspective, methodology, and set of sources for investigation; therefore, this thesis will pick from them piecemeal with the intention of presenting a reasoned approach to the IRA in the 1930s and 40s.

From the Easter Rising to the Troubles to disarmament to the time of this writing, any political, military, or cultural history of Ireland worth its salt has engaged the IRA in some way. The trouble in the historiography stems not from a lack of material, but from

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<sup>7</sup> With regards to spotty work, there has been a great deal of research on neutral Eire during the Second World War. While the IRA is not the intended subject of these books, in many of these books the IRA merits little or no mention while in others the organization's clout is totally overstated. For example, Donal O'Driscóil's *Censorship in Ireland 1939-1945: Neutrality, Politics, and Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) investigates the censorship of telegraphs, newspapers, and radio during the war, and even while it mentions that the IRA's letters to and from prison were heavily redacted, it abstains from any discussion of the IRA correspondence with foreign powers or the organization's pirate radio operations during the war. Carolle J. Carter's *The Shamrock and the Swastika* (Palo Alto, California: Pacific Books, 1977) is considered a groundbreaking work on the subject, but even her section "Irishmen in Germany" mainly deals with German espionage interests in the IRA, not the other way around. Similarly, Enno Stephan's *Spies in Ireland* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1963) is an excellent work on Abwehr operations in neutral Eire, but the IRA merit only cursory attention. With regards to being over-politicized, see Tim Pat Coogan. *The IRA*. (New York: Praeger, 1970), David O'Donoghue. *The Devil's Deal: The IRA, Nazi Germany and the Double Life of Jim O'Donovan* (Dublin: New Island Publishers, 2010), Tony Geraghty *The Irish War* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The Ira 1916-1979* (The MIT Press, 1970). Each of these books overemphasizes the ubiquity of republican thought in Eire throughout its history, leading to an overstatement of the social, political, and consequently the military importance of the IRA.

an excess of bias. Political histories of Ireland are interested in a narrative that describes the powers at play on the island; as such, the IRA and its insurgent war appears to largely be a nuisance and is eclipsed by the state interests of Britain and the Republic of Ireland. This perspective is understandable, but precludes the consideration of the IRA as a substantial contributor to the political development of the state.

Social histories get closer to a balanced narrative of the group, but records of IRA members are largely limited to those who are apprehended. As a result of viewing the IRA through such a lens, social histories invoke the negative biases and connotations that come with terms like *insurgent*, *criminal*, and, *terrorist*. These labels create a characterization of the IRA as external to Irish society. This approach, too, is flawed because it permits scholars to either overlook the IRA by considering them social outliers, or to overemphasize their contributions by considering the group as a popular movement. There is a great deal of work done specifically on the IRA or its members, but journalists also dominate that field and its evidence is overwhelmingly anecdotal and presented with the specific intent of protecting their sources. Dozens of reporters and journalists have engaged with the IRA over the past century and a half, and as a result, their body of work dwarfs that of the academy. The most prominent of these writers is Tim Pat Coogan, but writers like Robert Fisk and, much more recently, Tony Geraghty and Kevin Toolis have also written substantial and important works regarding the history of the insurgent group.

Coogan's most important title, *The IRA*, was first published in 1970 and presented a voluminous biography of the organization, its founders, and its political roots.

However, Coogan's sources in the 1960s were likely embroiled in the IRA-centered

political turmoil in Ireland commonly referred to as "The Troubles." As such, *The IRA* is presented without a bibliography, and its sources understandably remain protected by Coogan. *The IRA* is an example of impressive, courageous journalism, but the veracity of its sources cannot be criticized, nor can Coogan's methodology or analysis, a problem extenuated by Coogan's explicit pro-IRA bias. Ireland's oldest tradition, writes Coogan, is "risking health and happiness and even life itself not for themselves, but for an ideal."<sup>8</sup>

Another of Coogan's works, *Ireland in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, is, like *The IRA*, disturbingly silent on the IRA's darkest period, its involvement with the German Abwehr. Notably, both books include sections on Irish neutrality during the Second World War that lack any discussion of the IRA liaisons with the Germans or the landing of Abwehr agents into Ireland with the assistance of the republicans. Instead, Coogan focuses on de Valera's policies dealing with the organization, taking the spotlight from the IRA just in time to obscure the organization's most disturbing chapter.<sup>9</sup>

Avoiding the IRA's nastier side in favor of evaluating the de Valera government is another trend in journalistic histories. Robert Fisk, a correspondent for *The Times*, wrote a voluminous book on Irish history entitled *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster, and the Price of Neutrality 1939-45*. In this book, Fisk dedicates a special chapter to the IRA, yet discusses them in a vacuum. This is an easy mistake to make, as much of the political rhetoric of the day tends to cast the de Valera government as aggressively anti-IRA. However, it bears noting (and Fisk does not) that the de Valera government is characterized most clearly by playing both sides against the middle. Throughout the Second World War, de Valera masterfully walked the line between declared neutrality

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (London: Praeger, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 230-297.

and active support of the Allied cause. Fisk, however, overlooks de Valera's militant republican roots and his intimate relationship with men like IRA Director of Chemicals Jim O'Donovan in order to paint a picture of a political Ireland that existed separately from the militant underground.<sup>10</sup> To support this characterization, Fisk looks to evidence outside of the Irish political world rather than to Ireland herself. In Chapter 4 of *In Time of War*, he opens with a quote from Winston Churchill:

There seems to be a good deal of evidence, or at any rate suspicion, that the U-boats are being succoured from West of Ireland ports by the malignant section with whom de Valera dare not interfere.<sup>11</sup>

While this war suspicion was unfounded, Fisk fails to point out the extent to which de Valera did interfere with Churchill's "malignant section," that is the IRA. The result is that, *In Time of War*, published only slightly after Coogan's *The IRA* still falls short of a well-rounded account of the political, social, and cultural perspectives. What is of particular use, however, is the perception of fear and IRA power that Fisk has discovered. However, this perception and its importance are difficult for journalists to uncover. In short, these journalistic narratives lack the methodological perspective to ask the right questions of their sources. It is for that reason that intelligence histories are also particularly useful to this thesis.

The field of intelligence history has presented a potentially viable source base and method with which to investigate the IRA. Intelligence history is not the cure-all for IRA historiography, though. As is logical, intelligence sources and the histories that proceed from them largely revolve around the major combatants in wars, which Ireland has never been. Several influential scholars in intelligence history, however, have investigated and

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Fisk, *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster, and the Price of Neutrality 1939-45* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). See Chapter Four, "Any Sort of Stick to Beat Eire," 110-133.

<sup>11</sup> Fisk, 110

identified specific IRA dimensions in their work. Their treatment of the IRA is tangential to their larger points, but their investigations of IRA activities operate outside of the previously stated trends and demonstrate how the available sources might be used in conjunction with other methods to tell a more thorough story of the IRA.

Topping the list of such intelligence histories are Enno Stephan's *Spies and Ireland* and Mark Hull's *Irish Secrets: German Espionage in Ireland 1939-1945*. These books detail the lengths to which German intelligence agencies conducted operations in neutral Ireland during the Second World War. Both Stephan and Hull are clear that no such clandestine activity was possible without the involvement of the IRA, and these books reflect the place that militant republicans held in the minds of other nations, namely Germany. *Spies in Ireland* was written before any of the British, Irish, or American intelligence files had been declassified. Stephan's book illuminates the extent to which the German Abwehr II Office was interested in Ireland and, subsequently the IRA. While the subject of the book is primarily the German Abwehr and its sources gathered from post-war releases from the Abwehr war diary, Stephan's analysis shows that while the de Valera government and neutrality were the official conversations being had across the world with regard to Ireland, the official "Irish problem" was easily sidestepped.<sup>12</sup> This is an important lesson for historians particularly because it begs a reconsideration of the impact of IRA and militant republicans on the Second World War.

From the Allied perspective of World War II comes a similar vein of investigation into IRA politics, procedure, and crime. Paul McMahon's *British Spies and Irish Rebels* and Eunan O'Halpin's *Spying on Ireland* approach the same issue as Stephan and Hull, but from the British perspective. For McMahon and O'Halpin, the British intelligence

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<sup>12</sup> Enno Stephan, *Spies in Ireland*. Trans. Arthur Davidson (London: Macdonald, 1963), 33.

services are debilitated in their earliest counter-intelligence operations against Germany (operations conducted in neutral Ireland) because of the influence of the IRA.

Understanding the IRA is becoming more and more possible as the British, American, and Irish governments are releasing more and more classified material with regard to intelligence. The end of the Cold War has facilitated this phenomenon, and historians Paul McMahon and Eunan O'Halpin have capitalized on the recently declassified British files to produce two important books, each with important dimensions for the investigation of IRA impact on wartime decisions in World War II. First, Paul McMahon's *British Spies and Irish Rebels* consults official War Office, Foreign Office, and Admiralty records of the First and Second World Wars in order to show the turmoil involved in the creation of the UK's first intelligence agency. For McMahon, Ireland represented the first test, task, and training ground for the SIS. McMahon's narrative is intricately tied to the IRA, as Irish republicanism represents the most local threat to the Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. Additionally, McMahon claims that the Dublin Municipal Police's (DMP) experience with IRA informants directly informed the creation of SIS's counter-IRA tactics.<sup>13</sup> McMahon's consideration of the DMP is important because it provides this thesis with a precedent for how the newly available police records might be used to investigate the IRA.

Published in the same year as *British Spies*, Eunan O'Halpin's *Spying on Ireland* is a similar intelligence history with equally groundbreaking conclusions, both to the field of intelligence history, but also to IRA history. In his attempt to present an "all-agency" perspective on British intelligence O'Halpin's *Spying on Ireland* has finally placed the

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<sup>13</sup> Paul McMahon. *British Spies and Irish Rebels* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2008), 2-6.

“Irish problem” into a worldwide perspective.<sup>14</sup> *Spying on Ireland*, then, takes to task the exceptionalism of Irish republican violence. For O’Halpin, militant Irish nationalism informed, contributed to, or perhaps even mimicked other nationalist violence throughout the Commonwealth. In Egypt, India, and throughout the Middle East, the fundamental lack of solid intelligence crippled Great Britain’s capacity to govern, and nationals capitalized on that weakness. It was this global crisis, not simply the threat of militant Irish, which encouraged the creation of specialized British intelligence agencies. O’Halpin engages the IRA in a similar way to McMahon; when the Foreign Office or War Office was interested in trying something new, it was the IRA who was their target. Through underground cooperation with the DMP and the de Valera government, SIS conducted several operations in Ireland, many of which included arrests and double-crosses. These records have recently been declassified, and while neither O’Halpin nor McMahon use them specifically to draw conclusions about the IRA, one can see clearly how by investigating the secret interactions between spies and criminals, the story of the IRA might be uncovered.

As a result of the activities of the IRA, covert and diplomatic Abwehr agents and SIS operatives found themselves, sometimes unwittingly, in the crossfire between IRA insurgents and the Irish police force, the Garda.<sup>15</sup> To fully explore the depth of the IRA obstacle for Britain, Germany, and Eire, it is necessary to discuss three topics: the relationship between republican Irish organizations and foreign nations; the Sabotage

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<sup>14</sup> Eunan O’Halpin. *Spying on Ireland: British Intelligence and Irish Neutrality During the Second World War*. (Oxford University Press, 2008), vii. The “all-agency” approach investigates the Irish question in parallel to other British intelligence concerns during the Second World War and attempts to contextualize the intelligence interests and clandestine operations in Ireland amidst Britain’s general security concerns.

<sup>15</sup> The Garda is the Free State police service. The Free State’s secret intelligence branch is called Garda II, or G2.



Campaign in 1939-40, known as the S-Plan; and the unceasing attempts by the Abwehr to infiltrate the United Kingdom through neutral Eire. In each of these dimensions, the American, German, and British perception of the tactical and strategic might of the IRA was in stark contrast to the organization's actual power, yet a combination of age-old ethno-nationalist, political tensions, and sensationalist journalism prompted military decisions at the highest levels in Germany, Ireland, Britain, and the United States.

Militant Irish republicanism, by 1939, had become a global phenomenon. The Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century scattered Irish immigrants across the European continent, the British Commonwealth, and the United States. Many of these immigrants retained close ties to home and to their immigrant brothers and sisters, and large concentrations of Irish populations grew throughout the diaspora, most importantly in the United States. While the influx of Irish immigrants in the United States was not always well received, the Irish communities in American urban centers like Boston, New York, and Chicago were empowered by their large numbers and the rising labor movement.<sup>16</sup> As a result, by the time of the Anglo-Irish War (1921), Irish-Americans represented a substantial voter-base in the United States, and cultural organizations like the Gaelic Language League and Clan na Gael were able and willing to lend substantial Irish-American support to the struggling Irish back home, including extralegal assistance to IRA freedom fighters in the form of cash and weapons.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Labor union leaders like Terence V. Powderly and Mary Harris Jones represent Irish-Americans in leadership positions during the political struggle for labor in the United States. For more information on the Irish connection to American politics through labor, see Vincent J. Falzone. *Terence V. Powderly: Middle Class Reformer* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1978).

<sup>17</sup> Colin S. Gray, "The Anglo-Irish War 1919-21: Lessons from an Irregular Conflict," *Comparative Strategy* 26, 2007:371. See also Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 96-97, 102.

While the relationship between Irish-Americans and the Irish in Eire paid the most dividends for Irish nationalists, it also bears noting that IRA ambassadors made contacts with every other major world power in world during the interwar period. One such nationalist ambassador, "Pa" Murray met personally with Josef Stalin in 1925 to discuss a potential shipment of weapons to Ireland. Through Joseph McGarrity and Clan na Gael, arrangements were made to ship Thompson machine guns to India to assist in its rebellion against British rule.<sup>18</sup> One of these ambassadors was General Eoin O'Duffy, whose contributions to the international image of the IRA is particularly important to understanding the gap between perception and reality of the IRA. O'Duffy, by 1935, had fallen out of favor with IRA leaders like Stephen Hayes and Sean Russell for his pro-fascist leanings. However, a number of IRA men remained loyal to General O'Duffy and during the Spanish Civil War, he led a contingent of these Irish militants, called Blueshirts, to Spain to fight alongside Francisco Franco. Though in reality a split from IRA leadership, O'Duffy's Blueshirts were well received by German and Spanish fascists.

The relationships forged by the IRA demonstrated the energy that the IRA spent in order to remain internationally relevant, despite the fact that most of these relationships failed to produce meaningful or long-term benefits for the republican cause. Arranged weapon shipments, for example, were almost always either detained by local police, captured at sea by the British Navy, or confiscated by Irish police forces once they made it ashore in Eire.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For more on the Indo-German conspiracy and the involvement of Irish republicans, see Matthew Plowman, "Irish Republicans and the Indo-German Conspiracy of World War I," *New Hibernia Review* 7, no. 3 (2003): 81-105. For reference specifically to McGarrity's involvement, refer to 89-90.

<sup>19</sup> Coogan, *IRA*, 96.

These failures to secure a steady flow of weapons are important, however, because they show the myriad ways in which the British, German, and American authorities came to encounter and investigate the potential IRA threat. While the IRA was ultimately unsuccessful in securing a large, steady supply of weapons and materiel, British customs had no way of knowing the extent to which the Irish were smuggling weapons; they only knew that they were. This lack of intelligence in the interwar years contributed to the overemphasis of IRA danger by the Churchill government in the early years of World War II. To combat the perceived threat, Britain turned the attention of its international intelligence agency, the SIS, toward Ireland.<sup>20</sup>

The interwar IRA, for the British, was a potential “fifth column” of resistance in Ireland. By 1940, following the military successes of the Germans on the continent, a British invasion of Ireland became a potentially viable military option both to keep the peace there and to bulwark against a potential German U-boat campaign. While a political peace and alliance had been attained between the Britain and Ireland in 1923, the Churchill government knew that an occupation of Eire was unlikely to occur without bloodshed. Covert British intelligence in Eire, then, became particularly important for the British war effort as a means to detect potential German actions without engaging in a costly invasion of the neutral nation. Eire represented a number of operational and strategic resources that Britain needed, the most important of which were the treaty ports of Berehaven, Queenstown, and Lough Swilly. These ports had been returned to Eire in 1938, effectively reducing Britain’s ability to project naval power into the Atlantic by

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<sup>20</sup> For more on the timeline and specific deployment of intelligence service forces into Ireland, see Paul McMahon, *British Spies and Irish Rebels* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2008) and Eunan O’Halpin, *Spying on Ireland: British Intelligence and Irish Neutrality During the Second World War* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

300 miles.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, without British naval forces at the Treaty Ports, German saboteurs had a way into Britain through neutral Eire.

With an invasion of Eire off the table and with de Valera denying the ports to the British Navy, the Cabinet looked to other ways to handle the Ireland and the war on the continent. The result of these strategic concerns was the passage of the Prevention of Violence Act in 1939, which permitted British law enforcement to deport Irish citizens from the U.K., and required Irish immigrants to register with the authorities as aliens. The British government used this act to strictly police the border between Eire and to project its power into Eire throughout the war. Since Britain could not secure the Treaty Ports and ensure that no German spies could come ashore in Eire, the Prevention of Violence Act was used to investigate and intern potential Irish and potentially covert German operatives in the U.K.

For the IRA, the Second World War represented something altogether different. The IRA saw the tense military situation as an opportunity to better arm and train its members. The organization's most idealistic members invoked a longstanding relationship between the Irish republicans and foreign powers with hopes of using those relationships after the war to unify Ireland. Following the Irish Civil War that established the Irish Free State, the IRA began courting arms and monetary support from Irish-American organizations such as the Fenian Brotherhood and Clan na Gael as well as from Germany and other foreign countries. Aside from its relationship with Clan na Gael, most of these courtships came to nothing, though they worked to put IRA members in

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<sup>21</sup> Cobh to Berehaven, Ireland has approximately 350 km of coastline. This figure is an approximation that considers additionally that naval vessels after the return of the Treaty Ports had to be deployed from Plymouth or Londonderry in Northern Ireland, adding the additional distance in either case.

direct contact with German leadership and politicians in the United States.<sup>22</sup> Through its political presence in the United States and its consideration by Germany as a wartime asset, the IRA was able to remain a primary consideration in German, American, and British policies toward Irish neutrality, thus shaping the intelligence war in Eire throughout the Second World War.

However, the clout of the IRA was a matter of perception, not reality. During the interwar period, the IRA was broken financially and demoralized. The Irish Civil War marked the temporary end of a powerful, sustainable IRA. During the civil war, Irish republicans under Eamon de Valera, the leader of the Dail at the time and the country's *de facto* President, fought other Irish republicans under Michael Collins, the nation's finance minister, one of its treaty delegates to Britain, and hero of the Irish War for Independence over the terms, conditions, and ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922 that created the Irish Free State. For de Valera and the anti-treaty militants, the treaty was old wine in new bottles; the British would allow the southern counties to self-govern, but they must remain under the dominion of Britain, must swear oaths of allegiance to King George V, naming him the head of state, and must pay their portion of the imperial debt.<sup>23</sup> For Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith, this concession was the "freedom to obtain freedom."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> For more on the diasporic nature of Irish republicanism, see Chapter II.

<sup>23</sup> National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Secretary's Files S1.70, *Despatch from Eamon de Valera to J.H. Thomas (London) (No. 95), 2 July 1932*. Royal Irish Academy, Documents on Irish Foreign Policy (DIFP). This document calls for Britain to remove the requirement to make annual payments on the Irish government on the grounds that Eire must be able to vote on and determine its own debts and contributions to the Commonwealth.

<sup>24</sup> Dail Eireann Debates Vol 33. No. 17, 20 March 1930. Houses of the Oireachtas, [debates.oireachtas.ie](http://debates.oireachtas.ie), *Conference on Operation of Dominion Legislation*. This debate details the persistent position of the Fianna Fail party with regard to the Anglo-Irish treaty and restates Collins' position.

Collins and Griffith, without consulting the Dail, signed the treaty, permitting the six northern counties to opt out of Home Rule and remain under the British flag. What resulted was a costly war in which de Valera led IRA forces against Michael Collins and the army of the Irish Free State, which was now comprised of pro-treaty IRA men. The war claimed the lives of Collins and Griffith and left both sides severely crippled in terms of leadership, military experience, and international prestige.

The Irish Civil War was a bloodier conflict than the Anglo-Irish war had been. It culled from the IRA its most prominent and proficient leaders. The anti-treaty IRA was defeated, and de Valera was jailed until 1924. Many of the Anglo-Irish War IRA members, following the bloodshed of the civil war, turned to political and non-violent approaches to unifying Ireland and many more turned their attention to the stabilization and management of their newly emancipated Eire. When he was released, de Valera returned to political life and became the Prime Minister of the Irish Free State; one of his earliest actions was to ban the IRA due to the organization's commitment to violent reunification. The organization, then, began its degeneration into a thorn in the sides of the British, Irish, and American governments.

De Valera was able to win in popular elections and appointed ministers from the former anti-treaty camp like Defense Minister Frank Aiken; however, it is important to note that Eire's government, embodied by the Fianna Fail<sup>25</sup> party, did not represent the IRA, nor vice versa. While former anti-treatyites found their power on the rise in the government, their distance from the violent IRA prevented the IRA from sharing in their triumphs. This complex stubbornness in Irish politics characterizes many of the

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<sup>25</sup> Fianna Fail is the Republican political party founded after the Anglo-Irish war that fought against the Irish Republican Army during the Irish Civil War. Fine Gael is a Labour party.

relationships between the Irish government, the IRA, and the Great Powers of the Second World War.

In 1939, considering itself the more valid government of Ireland, the then illegal Irish Republican Army declared war on Britain.<sup>26</sup> The declaration gave the British government four days to vacate Northern Ireland under threat of reprisal if they did not. The conflict between Irish republicans and Britain was old news by 1939. To the minds of British political leadership, the Anglo-Irish War and the Irish Civil War had already forged a new Ireland for the Irish while permitting loyal subjects of the British crown to remain part of the United Kingdom.<sup>27</sup> As a result, British Parliament largely ignored this declaration from the IRA.<sup>28</sup>

Once the British failed to leave Northern Ireland, the IRA began bombing. The plan of attack, referred to as the S-Plan, was the result of IRA debates between Chief of Staff Sean Russell and Army Council Member Tom Barry. At the General Army Convention in 1938 Barry suggested that civilian targets in Northern Ireland be chosen for the bombing campaign. However, Barry's plan was rejected in favor of Russell's Sabotage Campaign, or S-Plan. The S-Plan targeted military and infrastructure buildings with the hope that such attacks would provoke a British military response.<sup>29</sup> While the bombing campaign failed to accomplish this goal, it succeeded in detonating nearly 100 bombs throughout the United Kingdom, including one placed in a urinal in Scotland

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<sup>26</sup> Unsean MacEoin, *The IRA in the Twilight Years, 1923-1948* (Dublin: Argenta Publications, 1997), 845-846

<sup>27</sup> Public Records Office (PRO) Cabinet Papers (CAB) 65/1.

<sup>28</sup> Dail Eireann Debates, 2 March, 1939. Houses of the Oireachtas, [debates.oireachtas.ie](http://debates.oireachtas.ie). Minister Ruttledge presents the declaration of war to Dail Eireann in support of the "Offences Against the State Bill," a law that would permit the government to intern IRA members.

<sup>29</sup> Coogan, *The IRA*, 131.

Yard, the headquarters of London's Metropolitan Police.<sup>30</sup> The IRA members' inexperience with explosives led to several IRA casualties. The first bombing attempt, in fact, was on a British customs post that was empty and resulted in the deaths of three IRA members who were planting the bombs when they exploded.<sup>31</sup>

The IRA considered the S-Plan an abject failure. However, the unintended immediate result of the bombing campaign was that both the German and the British intelligence communities began to view the IRA as a serious force in Eire. Since neither country had a window into the IRA's tumultuous leadership or its lack of training, each was forced to view the IRA through the lens of British police responses to the bombings and the newspaper coverage that painted the IRA as representative of the "true government of Eire."<sup>32</sup> This is not to say that British popular opinion validated the IRA as Eire's sovereign government; instead, IRA terror bombings assured the British popular audience (and the German intelligence audience by proxy of Berlin's London News Office) that the Irish Question was far from settled.

Officially, the de Valera government in Eire continued to take actions against the IRA that assured the British government that a military show of force in Eire was unnecessary.<sup>33</sup> During the period of bombing (February 1939-March 1940), only Eamon de Valera's government in Eire had the knowledge and experience to rightly assess and act against the Irish Republican fifth column. British reaction to the S-Plan came in the form of increased SIS attention on the island.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army*, 153.

<sup>32</sup> Dail Eireann Debates, 2 March 1939. Houses of the Oireachtas, [debates.oireachtas.ie](http://debates.oireachtas.ie)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



The act empowered the British Special Branch (MI5) to deport Irish citizens and contained a secret concession of Northern Ireland to Eire in 1940 in exchange for Eire's entrance into the war on behalf of the Allies.<sup>34</sup> The Germans, too, took notice of the attacks and the publicity they received and sent agent Oscar Pfaus to make contact with the IRA. In February of 1939, Pfaus made his way through the U.K. into Ireland to make contact with the organization. In a clear demonstration of his ignorance of the reality of IRA politics, Pfaus arranged to meet with Eoin O'Duffy, the former General who had volunteered with the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War. O'Duffy's alignment with the Fascists in Spain had made him and his Blueshirts, social outcasts from the IRA, which saw the war in Spain as irrelevant to the struggle for Irish unity. Despite being retired from the official IRA, O'Duffy was able to put Pfaus into contact with Seamus O'Donovan and Sean Russell, thus continuing a longstanding affair between German saboteurs and the IRA.

The most famous incident of German collusion with Irish militants is the Roger Casement affair in 1916. Casement was a decorated British consul turned Irish revolutionary who arranged for the transportation of several thousand guns from Germany to Ireland in April of 1916. These weapons were provided by the German government with the hopes that the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB, a precursor to the IRA) would use them to foment rebellion in Ireland and divert British military attention from the war on the continent. These weapons were rounded up relatively easily and Casement was executed as a traitor.

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<sup>34</sup> Frank Pakenham, Earl of Longford and T.P. O'Neill, *Éamon de Valera* (London: Hutchinson, 1970), 365-368. De Valera, in perhaps his most controversial decision as Teoiseach, declined the concession of the northern counties, fearing that entrance into the war on Britain's terms would be tantamount to political regression.

A second attempt at smuggling ended similarly for the IRA. After called the "Indo-Irish Conspiracy," the IRA's second attempt to smuggle weapons to fight against the British involved using German weapons to arm Indian nationalists in that country's struggle for independence. That cargo, consisting mostly of Thompson machine guns, was transported from New York to Galveston, Texas, where it was loaded onto a train to San Diego. While the weapons were eventually detected by authorities in the United States, McGarrity and Clan na Gael's readiness to violate federal law in order to undermine British interests worldwide were not forgotten by the United States, by Britain, or by Germany. What does, however, seem to have been forgotten, was the abject failure of these operations and the ease with which their perpetrators were apprehended.

Eire's stalwart neutrality throughout World War II raised many obstacles for both the Allies and the Axis. For Britain and the United States, a campaign of coercion and attempted bribery fell short of conscripting Eire to the Allied cause. For Germany, de Valera's stubbornness demonstrated a shared understanding between the two states that German occupation of Eire would not be the route to independence or reunification. Following German operations in the Saarland, Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Vichy, the de Valera position on German collusion was clear. The German invasions on the continent had resulted in an imperialistic expansion for Germany, and de Valera's neutrality was Eire's first line of defense against being thusly subjugated. De Valera's dedication to neutrality served to keep the British from using Eire for political and military aims first and foremost; it produced a similar, if not an even more magnified effect, for Germany. Additionally, the close relationship between the Irish and the Irish-

American represented a dangerous connection between Ireland and the United States, whose entrance into the war Germany sought to avoid or postpone as long as possible. Germany would not invade Eire without cause or invitation, and neither was likely to be forthcoming. The Abwehr decided instead to operate covertly on the island until such a time as an invasion of Britain became necessary.<sup>35</sup> Until their defeat in the Battle of Britain and the subsequent abandonment of Operation Sealion, German strategists maintained the viability of an invasion of Ireland, but only once Irish neutrality could be properly subverted and the fear of American intervention dampened.

De Valera's decision to remain neutral was not surprising. It carried political implications that were easily read. The IRA viewed de Valera as a traitor, a turncoat from the Anglo-Irish War who had supported them in the taking up of arms against the "enemies at the gate" but who had then forsaken them for Michael Collins' cries of "the freedom to obtain freedom."<sup>36</sup> During this time, the government in Eire was faced with the challenge of maintaining its legitimacy in the face of substantial IRA propaganda campaigns and the fear of potential IRA violence in Eire.

As a result of the Garda's ongoing campaign against the IRA, the G2 was able to tacitly support the more experienced British SIS intelligence gathering in Eire. Additionally, because German Abwehr agents chose to operate independently or with IRA assistance, the Garda's pre-existing strategies for ferreting out and interning IRA soldiers and sympathizers made them by far the most effective tool for snuffing out German intelligence operations in Eire.

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<sup>35</sup> Not to be confused with Plan Kathleen, the IRA-sanctioned invasion of Northern Ireland, the Wehrmacht and Abwehr were at work on an invasion plan for Ireland titled "Plan Green."

<sup>36</sup> Vincent J. Peters, "Neutral on the British Side" from *Triskelle - Irish History*. [www.triskelle.eu/history](http://www.triskelle.eu/history).

President de Valera's tacit cooperation with Britain served two purposes. First, it gave an ailing Britain a reason to turn counter-intelligence operations in Ireland over to the Irish. Lastly, the neutrality of Ireland permitted the de Valera government to simultaneously rebuff a future as a German puppet state like Vichy and to formally distance itself from Britain, thus paving the road for the Republic of Ireland in 1949.

The war for intelligence, the world of spies and espionage, operates by definition beneath the notice of prying eyes. As communications technology advanced by leaps and bounds throughout the war, the potential for intelligence warfare developed. The war was fought with invisible ink, disguises, and cover-stories, with late night parachutes and buried radio sets. Assaults were defended with double-crossing agents whose trust must be bought. In this war, however, both the Germans and the British mistook the IRA. British paranoia over the efficacy of the group hamstrung its own SIS while German admiration of jobs that were, in fact, poorly done ensured that Abwehr agents would be easily caught and interned by neutral Eire's police. In a war that is fought with lies and misdirection, the contrast between the IRA's actual potential and its perceived menace is particularly sharp.

## CHAPTER II

## INTERNATIONAL IRISH REPUBLICANISM

Historians Michael von Tangen-Page and M.L.R. Smith point out that the IRA has “historically been imbued with a sense of military vanguardism.”<sup>37</sup> As a result of this, they argue, “the movement has seen little need to seek external sources of political authority and legitimacy through popular consent.”<sup>38</sup> While there is no argument that the IRA sought to describe themselves as Ireland’s true protectors from the oppression of “Brittania’s Huns,”<sup>39</sup> Page and Smith’s vision of the organization paints an incomplete picture of the IRA in this regard. Their article, “War by Other Means” hangs the IRA’s actions on the “conviction that exemplary violence will awaken the supposedly latent nationalist consciousness of the Irish people,”<sup>40</sup> rather than on any grand strategic capacity that the IRA may have had. The IRA had, in fact, a significant international presence. So significant, in fact, that the organization became a strategic consideration of the Allies in the Second World War.

This chapter will argue that on the eve of the Second World War, the British government knew of the prolific international nature of Irish republicanism. The internationality of Irish republicanism is important to the narrative of the Second World War because it was the IRA’s ability to exploit these international concerns that deeply concerned and motivated British intelligence and subsequently the British War Cabinet. To explore the far-reaching presence of the Irish republican phenomenon, this chapter

<sup>37</sup> Michael von Tangen Page and M.L.R. Smith, “War by Other Means: The Problem of Political Control in Irish Republican Strategy,” *Armed Forces & Society*, 27, no. 1 (2000): 79-104.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>39</sup> Canon Charles O’Neill, *The Foggy Dew*, 1919. See Cathal O’Boyle. *Songs of the County Down*. (Skerries, Ireland: Gilbert Dalton, 1973).

<sup>40</sup> Robert Kee, *The Green Flag* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972), 30. See also “S.O.D” and “Wolfe Tone and Today,” *United Irishman* (Dublin, Ireland), June, 1949. Cited in Page and Smith, “War by Other Means.”

will discuss political and logistical relationships between IRA and Irish republican advocates in Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, the Soviet Union, and the United States. These relationships are clearly visible through the reports of British intelligence agencies that regularly reported to the Cabinet Office from 1921 to the beginning of the war in a series of reports called the "Reports of Revolutionary Organizations."<sup>41</sup> When the war began, the Cabinet Office and the War Office were concerned with the capacity of the IRA to inflict harm on the United Kingdom. In the interwar years, Irish republicanism seemed to British intelligence to be a spreading nuisance, as indeed it was. By 1940, the Cabinet reported that the IRA was "almost strong enough to over-run the weak Eire forces."<sup>42</sup> The Cabinet made it clear that they were preparing to send forces into Ireland as a result of the IRA's collusion with the Germans.

The relationships between the IRA, Irish republicans, the interwar and wartime Irish government, and Eire's political parties is a convoluted Venn diagram in which virtually every political label overlaps with one or most of the others. Useful consideration of the IRA during the interwar years, then, requires some clarification on who comprised the organization and how they can be identified. In its interwar incarnation, the IRA acted outside of the official political power structure, meaning that the IRA's chain of command from the local commanders to the General Staff were not office holders in the Irish government.<sup>43</sup> While the Irish Government had regular and open communication with Britain in the interwar years, the position of the IRA was that force was the only language that the British understood. This philosophy led the group to

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<sup>41</sup> PRO, CAB 24. "Report of Revolutionary Activities" refers to the title of every report in this series. When individual reports are referenced, their specific CAB number is used.

<sup>42</sup> PRO CAB 65/7/42, "War Cabinet 147 (40)," 30 May, 1940, 306

<sup>43</sup> Page and Smith, 86.

a kind of “military exclusivism: the idea that violence is automatically purposeful wherever, and howsoever, employed.”<sup>44</sup> The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and IRA leadership believed that the “Army [had] to hew the way for politics to follow.”<sup>45</sup>

In pursuing this goal, the IRA put itself quickly and powerfully at odds with the political structure of Ireland. However, the political crusade against the IRA was not an ideological problem, but a practical one. Taoiseach de Valera saw the IRA as too violent and criminal, despite his sympathy with the organization’s cause. It bears noting that many of the Free State officials were, in fact, former IRA men themselves, thus a strict ideological line between the Fianna Fail government and the IRA cannot be drawn. The Minister of Defense, Frank Aiken, for example, had resigned as an Officer Commanding (O.C.) of the IRA only very shortly before being appointed to his cabinet post. De Valera himself had fought against the British in the Anglo-Irish War and against Michael Collins’ Pro-Treaty IRA. This particular factor of Irish politics in the pre-war years is important because it demonstrates that Fianna Fail was still powerfully connected to the republican movement ideologically. The break had come for Irish republicans in the prewar years in how to practically operate the free state that they had achieved while continuing to struggle for the Six Counties in the north that had remained with the United Kingdom. As evidence of the political structure’s sympathy for its more radical cousin, one need only look to the highly lenient practices of law enforcement and lawmakers in Ireland in the interwar years. In 1935, for example, de Valera denied Garda requests for permission to conduct manhunts for IRA men based on intelligence that they were armed with weapons left over from the Irish Civil War. It was de Valera’s belief that men who

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<sup>44</sup> Page and Smith, 83.

<sup>45</sup> IRB leader Liam Lynch, quoted in Kee, *The Green Flag*, 661.

had fought for the country should be permitted to surrender their weapons voluntarily and should not be imprisoned or interned for their reluctance to do so.<sup>46</sup>

The complex relationship between the IRA and the Irish Government created obvious problems for British and later American intelligence and strategic decisions. While the IRA was the problem, the Irish government was the appropriate agency with which to discuss a solution. That the Irish government had passive sympathies and direct family or personal connections for the enemy only further complicated these discussions and the actions that might result from them. What resulted, between the Irish Free State and the United Kingdom, was a relationship in which British politicians advocated the importance of diplomatic, peaceful solutions while simultaneously deploying Secret Intelligence Service and MI5 resources into the Free State to gather intelligence on IRA and other potentially violent groups.

During the Irish Civil War, British intelligence agencies were monitoring the activities and weapons trafficking of IRA agents around the world. In the November 1922 "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom," several of these agents were identified to the Cabinet Department. For example, the report discusses a local sports organizer in Scotland, Art O'Brien. O'Brien was described in the report as "acting as chief Publicity Agent to the Republicans, [who] sends and receives all his correspondences by hand, employing women for this purpose."<sup>47</sup> The MI5 reports also identified Sean McGrath, "O'Brien's aide-de-camp, [who] is known to be acting as a go-between or introducer for the Republican arms agents, of whom there are several in this country at present." Scotland was a particularly troublesome haven for Irish republicans

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<sup>46</sup> NAI Department of the Taoiseach (DT) S11564A, "Activities in Ireland, IRA" 1939-1950.

<sup>47</sup> PRO, CAB 24/140, "Report on Revolutionary Organizations in the United Kingdom.," November 1922, 17.



in the interwar years, no doubt because of its proximity to Northern Ireland and longstanding familial ties between Scottish and Irish families. The same report pointed out that Glasgow saw the opening of a "Gaelic Literary Revival Society," which the SIS believed was another device for "ensnaring young men for the Irish Republican Army."<sup>48</sup> While the example of Irish republican activity in Scotland does, technically, demonstrate the organization as an international presence, Scotland and Ireland are so culturally, economically, and socially connected, there exists the need to look farther abroad to demonstrate the extent of the republican diaspora. In 1922, the SIS reported to the Cabinet that Scottish publisher Joe Robinson published a Scottish edition of "Republic of Ireland" and was successful obtaining a subscription from a Spanish Republican organization.<sup>49</sup>

Spain was one of the more important places in Europe where Irish republicans were able to build a presence. Following the Irish Civil War, Irish nationalists regularly sought a market to spread the word of Irish independence and unification in Spain. Ireland and Spain each had a predominantly Catholic population and shared a history of military cooperation leading back to the sixteenth century.<sup>50</sup> When the Spanish Civil War erupted in 1936, Irish republicans had sympathy for Spaniards on both sides of the Fascist line. The IRA was experiencing, at that time, a conflict of its own over how best to move the organization forward. Local commanders (OCs) took up the various monikers of popular 1930s politics; there were Communist OCs, Liberal OCs, Fascist

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> For more information on this, see Trinity College Dublin's ongoing research project, "Irish and Scottish Military Migration to Spain," in the Centre for Irish-Scottish and Comparative Studies (CISCS). This project is currently headed by Professor David Dickson and can be found at [www.tcd.ie/CISS/index.php](http://www.tcd.ie/CISS/index.php)

OCs.<sup>51</sup> Hazy lines characterize Irish politics, and IRA politics is no different. In a confidential memo dated 4/4/30, the Irish Garda reported on their investigation of anti-state activities:

It is...of interest to note that much the same people appear to be behind several organizations, Mrs. Maude Gonne [Sean MacBride's mother] being as ubiquitous as it is possible to be.<sup>52</sup>

The most important division in this regard, however, was that of Eoin O'Duffy's "Blueshirts," IRA men who supported the notions of Fascism and mobilized and traveled to Spain to assist Franco's forces during the war. In response, IRA notable Frank Ryan followed with a contingent of anti-Franco Irishmen. Franco's forces captured Ryan, and interestingly the Fianna Fail government took steps to secure his freedom. That the Dublin Government sent representation to Spain on the behalf of a known IRA OC belies de Valera's sympathies for his former brothers-in-arms. In a correspondence from Leopold H. Kerney, Ireland's Minister to Spain, to Irish Director of Foreign Affairs Joseph Walshe, the minister reported on his meeting with a local *New York Times* reporter, saying that Franco was made aware of "'some intervention' [that] had been made on behalf of Frank Ryan, and that Franco 'was very annoyed' that there should be any such intervention on behalf of 'such a man.'"<sup>53</sup>

Kerney attempted to push some information to Franco through his reporter contact that was considered "persona grata"<sup>54</sup> with Franco. He informed the reporter that the execution of Ryan might have served to "alienate some sympathy which exists for Franco in Ireland." Even more telling in this letter, however, is the minister's suggestion

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<sup>51</sup> NAI DT S5864A, "Anti-State Activities, 1931."

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> NAI DFA Madrid Embassy 10/11 "Letter from Leopold Kerney to Joseph Walshe." 13 April 1938.

Retrieved from Documents on Irish Foreign Policy, <http://www.difp.ie/>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

that if no further avenues could be explored for the release of Ryan, "It might be worthwhile considering whether the British Agent in Salamanca should not be instructed at some early date – in the event that no news reaching us from other sources – to enquire at the Ministry for External Affairs in Burgos as to Ryan's fate."<sup>55</sup> Rather than to let Ryan be executed, a fate he was very likely facing, the Irish government pled for his release. Ryan was in fact released, into Germany. There he continued plotting, with the German Abwehr, against the British. The Ryan affair demonstrates the complex dilemma that befell neutral Ireland in the Second World War, but also shows that the IRA did not represent an isolated problem for Great Britain, but rather one that required a huge net of international diplomatic connections and resources to monitor. Finally, it serves to explain why British attempts to alienate the IRA through counter-intelligence and propaganda were resisted by de Valera's government. The Dublin government saw the IRA as a problem clearly enough; however, the problem was one for Irishmen to deal with and was one that de Valera was unwilling to see handled elsewhere.

In addition to the IRA's meddling in the struggles of other countries, the IRA was itself was a target for international meddling. When the dust settled after the Irish Civil War, the Soviet Union opened its arms to Irish republicans and engaged in talks with Eamon de Valera in several occasions. These meetings were considered serious and dangerous by British intelligence, as they represented the confluence of two particularly dangerous phenomena, communism and Irish Republicanism. As early as 1920, the British Home Office's Directorate of Intelligence published a "Monthly Review of Revolutionary Movements" that marked the involvement of Soviet agents with the growing discontent in Ireland. The Directorate noted a secret meeting of the Communist

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

International Congress in Berlin on 12 June, 1920, in which “a group of Anarchists has been entrusted with special work by Lenin and has been responsible for the sending of arms to Ireland.”<sup>56</sup> Very little ever came of the relationship between the IRA, Irish republicans, and the Soviet Union. The importance of this relationship is in considering the perceptions and fears involved in the relationship’s potential, as seen and felt by British intelligence. In January 1924, de Valera sent a telegram to USSR to request help for imprisoned revolutionaries. The Soviet representative reported back, “Unfortunately the international situation does not permit the Soviet Government openly to raise its voice against the repressions and injuries inflicted by the British Government in Ireland.”<sup>57</sup>

Soviet reluctance to assist in the republican struggle did not dissuade republicans from cultivating relationships with the USSR, however. In 1929, a group of republicans calling themselves “The Friends of Soviet Russia” traveled to Moscow to meet with Soviet leadership.<sup>58</sup> Among this group were IRA regulars Frank Ryan, Geoffrey Coulter, and Kathleen Price. Here again, it is important to distinguish IRA and republican actions from those of the Free State, a distinction that was regularly absent from the threat assessments of British intelligence, as the Directorate of Intelligence often related the actions of men like Sean MacBride, Frank Ryan, or of the women of Cumann na mBan<sup>59</sup> to the disposition of the Irish government. This relation factors strongly in the inflation of the consideration of IRA potential during the Second World War. This relation was

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<sup>56</sup> PRO CAB 24/111, “A Monthly Review of Revolutionary Movements in British Dominions Overseas and Foreign Countries,” No. 21, (1920): 24.

<sup>57</sup> PRO CAB 24/164, “Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom,” Report No. 237, 3 January 1924, 11.

<sup>58</sup> NAI DT S5864A “Anti-State Activities, 1931.”

<sup>59</sup> Cumann na mBan, or “The Women’s Council” is a powerful and influential women’s republican organization that consisted largely of the wives and sisters of influential IRA men.

profoundly incorrect. In fact, during the Irish Civil War, the Irish government maligned the relationship between the republicans and the Soviet Union:

The guns and ammunition which the irregulars have been trying to buy or borrow from Russia may add to the destructions, but will not bring de Valera or any of his tail appreciably near to either alternative their programme, either victory over or extermination of the Irish nation.<sup>60</sup>

Had the IRA's lasting international connections consisted only of collusion with Fascists and pipe-dreams of Soviet assistance, British fear of the organization may well have dwindled as victory in the Second World War became more likely. However, the most important international relationships that Irish republicans were able to establish were with British Commonwealth countries and the United States. These relationships, more than any of the others, made the IRA a factor in the strategic considerations of the War Cabinet during the war.

A thorough discussion of Irish-American familial, political, and cultural connections could, and has, filled volumes of scholarship. For the purpose of this chapter, a more concise consideration of this relationship will suffice. In the 1930s, Irish republicans found a massive pool of human and fiscal resources in the United States. Several organizations in Boston, New York, and Chicago met to support the IRA and the unification of Ireland. The most important of these groups was Clan na Gael, which consisted of political and labor leaders in the United States and which spearheaded much of the IRA's resource gathering in the western hemisphere. Several Clan na Gael leaders appeared on the British intelligence radar during the interwar years. One example is the story of Dr. Patrick McCarten, a republican who was interned after his participation in the 1916 Easter Rising. McCarten escaped to France and continued to sneak in and out of

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<sup>60</sup> NAI DT S/2108, "Supply of Arms by Soviet Government." 7 March, 1923.

Ireland, assisting the IRA through the War for Independence and the Civil War. In 1931, McCarten took a secret mission to Ireland from the United States, during which he worked with Jim Larkin, Ireland's most famous labor leader. British intelligence followed McCarten and reported that he was a member of the Irish Progressive League and Friends of Irish Freedom, and very influential.<sup>61</sup>

The most influential of the American republicans was undeniably Joseph McGarrity, a close friend of John Devoy and Eamon de Valera who assisted the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the smuggling of arms to India during the First World War.<sup>62</sup> McGarrity's career with the republican struggle consisted mainly of financing and political contact management, and he was responsible for arranging the transport of Sean Russell during the Second World War to Germany by way of the United States. McGarrity and McCarten, to list but two in a long list of Irish-American republican activists in a wide range of organizations, each demonstrate the international, diasporic nature of Irish republicanism, and, more importantly, of the involvement of republicans in Irish affairs.<sup>63</sup>

British intelligence, at the eve of the Second World War, then, was actively following, monitoring, and reporting on Irish republicans all over the world. In a report to the Cabinet department in 1931, Special Intelligence Reported that "Irishmen in the United States are reported to be planning a revolt against England on a large scale in September, in which Ireland, Canada, India, and Persia are to take part. It will be financed by the Irish Americans, and is no doubt connected with the reported treaty made

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<sup>61</sup> PRO CAB 24/111, 61.

<sup>62</sup> Plowman, 81-105.

<sup>63</sup> For a good discussion of American Irish republican organizations, including the 19<sup>th</sup> century Fenians, the Friends of Irish Freedom, and Clan na Gael, see Michael Doorley. *Irish-American Diaspora Nationalism: The Friends of Irish Freedom, 1916-1935* (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2005).

by the Nationalist revolutionaries of various countries against Great Britain at Moscow.”<sup>64</sup> This paranoia was, admittedly, as much a fear of the spread of Communism as the spread of Irish radicalism, and it should be noted that it was the job of the Special Intelligence Directorate to report on all the potential threats to the Crown, no matter their magnitude.<sup>65</sup> That is not to say that the Special Intelligence Service had no evidence to suggest a legitimate danger in the Irish republicans. As far back as 1921, agents were capturing and assisting in the apprehension of gunrunners in the U.K. headed for Ireland. On May 26<sup>th</sup>, intelligence reports were delivered to the Cabinet regarding five men arrested in Manchester. The day before, a police raid in Whalley Range, in Manchester, found 618 detonators, 1,719 rounds, 2,583 high explosive charges, 25 rifles, 4 pistols, 6 bayonets. When questioned, one of the men said, “My orders are not to say anything.” They were believed to be Sinn Feiners. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, Irish Republican William Dunne, aka Lane, aka The Digger, and his colleague John Punch solicited Sergeant Batty of the Kings’ Liverpool Regiment to sell 34 rifles and 10,000 rounds. A fourth man, mysteriously called “The Stranger” was at this meeting, though this man was never apprehended.<sup>66</sup> In 1930, these reports continued:

It appears that the IRA is organized on a divisional and brigade basis. War material reaches Ireland from Manchester in considerable quantities and Jews are said to be active in sending these consignments.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the existence of these threats, the human resources devoted to the Special Intelligence Service was extremely limited, and as a result the intelligence that came back

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<sup>64</sup> PRO CAB 24/111, 61.

<sup>65</sup> The CAB 24 Series contains entries along a wide range of threats, including “Communists in the Commonwealth,” “the poor,” “the unemployed,” and “labor unions” to name but a few.

<sup>66</sup> PRO CAB 24/125, “Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom,” Report No. 108, 13.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

to the Home Office and the Cabinet was often exaggerated. In reality, the IRA was a disorganized group of idealists, and while they were certainly capable of minor skirmishes against the United Kingdom, the kind of organized violence that British officials saw in the future of the IRA was never possible. In reality, the organization was dodging effective police raids in its own country and failing to acquire the support of disinterested states around the world. In a Cabinet report written in 1935, the Intelligence Directorate reported “messages continue to be carried in Ireland by very young members of the Fianna<sup>68</sup>, who are exempt from search owing to their youth.”<sup>69</sup> Irish republicans in Scotland, Spain, and the United States very often used women and children to run messages, guns, and material to and from Eire in the interwar years, and in a few cases, successfully. However, in nearly every way, the IRA suffered from the same economic hardships as the rest of interwar Ireland.<sup>70</sup> Resources were scarce and training more so. What did exist in both cases was reserved for the battalions on the island, which themselves were constantly harried by Garda raids and Fianna Fail pressure. The challenges of the IRA were under-investigated, however. The organization seemed to be in bed with all of Britain’s enemies at the start of the Second World War, and seemed to be poised and ready to strike. As a result of this perception, SIS and the War Cabinet took the IRA too seriously. The next chapter will discuss the IRA’s most ambitious project during the opening years of the Second World War and its catastrophic failure.

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<sup>68</sup> The Fianna Eireann was a volunteer youth organization founded on the Boy Scouts model. This organization was comprised almost exclusively of young republicans and, while it maintained that it was a sport league and community service organization, it was, from 1900-1950 the youth wing of the Irish Republican Army.

<sup>69</sup> PRO CAB 24/125, 14.

<sup>70</sup> For more on this, see Clair Wills. *That Neutral Island: A Cultural History of Ireland During the Second World War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).



The S-Plan, as it was called, demonstrates the reality of the IRA's inability to bring about change through violence.

## CHAPTER III

## THE S-PLAN

The worldwide spread of Irish nationalism sets the stage for an international understanding of the IRA. This chapter will argue, however, that this understanding was skewed and led to a misinformed analysis of Ireland in the Second World War. The chapter will investigate the organizational troubles of the IRA during the interwar period and will conclude with a consideration of the Sabotage Campaign of 1939-40, better known as the S-Plan. This series of IRA attacks on Britain represents the culmination of the mobilization of all of the IRA's available resources from 1937-39, including its human resources, political capital, and munitions. The attacks failed to accomplish the IRA's objectives, beyond causing a considerable amount of property damage and a few deaths, many of which were the deaths of IRA bombers themselves. Aside from describing the inability of the IRA to wage a guerilla war in the immediate wake of Partition, this chapter will describe how the prejudicial British considerations of the IRA, embodied by Winston Churchill's powerful rhetoric in the wake of the S-Plan attacks, were responsible for Britain's strategic military consideration of Ireland, a consideration shared by the United States and Germany. This chapter argues that the S-Plan is the reason for this military consideration, despite its total failure. A thorough explanation of the S-Plan and its significance, however, first requires a brief exploration of the state of the IRA leading up to the planning and deployment of the 1939 Sabotage Campaign.

In the years immediately following the Irish Civil War, the IRA was in a state of turmoil. Leaders in the organization were faced with a crisis of identity in the wake of peace. The IRA, in its official form, had dragged the British to the negotiating table by

force of arms in the Anglo-Irish War. By the 1930s, however, the IRA had suffered a schism as a result of the Irish Civil War. Two militant armed republican factions emerged. The pro-treaty faction entered into the official government of the Free State, laying down its arms, maintaining its public and international respectability, and turning its political power onto the anti-treaty Republicans. The anti-treaty faction became the only IRA to speak of in the interwar years. The Old IRA's leaders like Richard Mulcahy and William Cosgrave laid down their commitments to armed conflict and took on leadership roles in the Free State government, and began wrestling with the crisis of identity which resulted from the organization's need to persevere in the struggle for a united Ireland while simultaneously taking the victory for which it had fought. It may go without saying that the IRA did not share the pro-treaty politicians' views on the future of Ireland, but the extent to which the IRA was operating in Ireland lends an understanding of how prolific the republican sentiment was in Eire and, more importantly, how extensively monitored the situation was. The state of militant republicanism and its relationship to the government in Eire is informative because it demonstrates the actual weakness of the IRA and the extent to which the Irish government had the situation well in hand. From 1933-1940, the Teoiseach received regular reports specifically on the militant actions of the IRA.<sup>71</sup> The ultimate question for the new generation of IRA men, men like Sean Russell, Stephen Hayes, and Frank Ryan, was how to maintain the organization's legitimacy while making progress toward a united Ireland. Their failure to accomplish those goals, and more specifically the ways they were seen to have attempted them, informs the larger point of this thesis by demonstrating that while the major powers of World War II had some reason to investigate the IRA, neither the Allies nor the Axis

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<sup>71</sup> NAI DT S11564A.

committed the necessary resources to intelligence gathering in Ireland in order to get a full picture of the organization.

As seen in Chapter I, the need for legitimacy took the IRA around the world in the interwar years, and developing political systems were regularly brought back to the Free State and workshopped by politically-minded IRA men. For example, Sean MacBride, a chief in the IRA, advocated strongly the need for National Socialism, and was one of the chief advocates of Marxism among the laborers in Ireland.<sup>72</sup> Eoin O'Duffy was an advocate of national corporatism when he took former IRA men down to Spain to fight with Franco. Longstanding relationships between the Irish and the Germans also prompted several meetings between IRA men and German political chiefs. The IRA had many irons in many fires, politically and militarily, and this fact, more than any other, contributes to the understanding of the essential weakness of the organization in the interwar period. Fighting with the Free State authorities, fighting with British law enforcement and military intelligence, and, moreover, fighting with one another characterized the inter-war IRA.

Despite the infighting and the Free State and British propaganda, the IRA was largely accepted, if not explicitly advocated, by the Irish population in the years following Partition. In 1931, Garda Detective J. Scully reports that one of his informants informed him that the Irish Post would deliver any letters the IRA had requested,

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<sup>72</sup> PRO Records of the Security Service (KV) 2/769, "The Haller Report." This report was taken after the war from a detained German intelligence officer. He gave his report of his points of contact in the IRA during the interwar and early war periods, including a brief discussion of MacBride's Marxism and labor activism. See also J. Bowyer Bell. *The Secret Army: The IRA 1916-1979*, 130-132 for a discussion of Sean MacBride, Sean Russell, and Eoin O'Duffy's attempts to direct the identity of the organization between 1936-1938. In addition, the *Irish Independent*, 28 September 1931 reports that "MacBride hopes the [new] Constitution will overthrow colonialism and capitalism," leaving Ireland to be "ruled 'working class people'" from NAI DT/S 5864A.

regardless of the censorship laws.<sup>73</sup> During an attack on the Garda in September of 1942, several IRA men escaped capture “carrying a machine gun and other weapons, [they] had to pass through a crowd of some thirty or forty persons, not one of whom came forward.”<sup>74</sup> The battle for public opinion, therefore, was an uphill battle for the de Valera government. Kevin Toolis, author of *Rebel Hearts: Journeys Within the IRA's Soul*, explains the tacit acceptance of the IRA by recalling the structure of the organization and its community ties, saying, “The IRA is a clan-like organization, with extremely strong family ties, ties that are almost dynastic in nature.”<sup>75</sup> The family-centered nature of the IRA in the interwar years made de Valera’s crusade against the IRA hard to prosecute, particularly due to the Teoiseach’s rhetoric on the importance on the small towns and his desire to see power returned to the land. De Valera’s “ideal Ireland was a self-sufficient rural republic, Catholic in religion and Irish-speaking.”<sup>76</sup> Such a pastoral, conservative Ireland had, as its constituency, the very families that traditionally contributed to and politically defended the IRA. In a report to the Teoiseach in 1940, for example, there were seven murders and eighteen attempted murders of former government informants; while the evidence pointed to reprisal killings for government cooperation, the local police were insistent that “it is not possible to say with certainty whether these crimes were ‘official’ IRA killings.”<sup>77</sup> The popular acceptance of the IRA is important because it further obfuscates the British, American, and German capacity to see the IRA for the disorganized group that it was. When Allied and Axis intelligence canvassed the people, what they found was crowds of people complicit in the violence and willing to protect the

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<sup>73</sup> NAI DT/S 5864A,

<sup>74</sup> NAI DT/11654A, “Report to the Teoiseach on IRA activity in Eire, September 1942.”

<sup>75</sup> Kevin Toolis, in discussion with the author, Many Rivers Films, London, UK, 4 July 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Wills, 26.

<sup>77</sup> NAI DT/11564A.

perpetrators. To the Allies, this situation led them to connect the IRA with the disposition of Ireland as a state. To the Germans, it seemed as though the IRA were the perfect conduit for sabotage.

Chapter I discusses the extent to which the IRA was not officially an agent of the Irish Government. In fact, a great deal of time and resources in Eire from 1937-45<sup>78</sup> were spent attempting to suppress the IRA. A number of legislative measures were taken to stop the spread of radical, militant republicanism in the Free State, most notably the Offences Against the State Act of 1939. This law permitted the internment without trial of individuals implicated in treasonous activity and was directly aimed at isolating IRA members.<sup>79</sup> The policing of the IRA by the Free State Government from 1930-39 is of particular importance because during the Second World War because as Britain considered military action against Ireland, the Free State Government shared much of the gathered intelligence on the organization with Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, SIS.<sup>80</sup> Eire's Intelligence Service, the Garda II (G2) gathered much of this information from interned IRA men and women. By 1940, over a thousand IRA men and women were interned at Mountjoy Prison and the Offences Against the State Act had produced a turnover of paroled IRA men and incoming internees that ensured that throughout the interwar period, G2 had immediate access to 400-600 republican militants.<sup>81</sup> However, de Valera's hope was, prior to 1939, to bring his former comrades-in-arms back to the fold. The weapons used during the Irish Civil War were permitted to remain in the hands

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<sup>78</sup> 1937 is an important year here, due to the adoption of the new Irish Constitution, or "de Valera" constitution, in which the Free State of Ireland declared herself, albeit illegally, independent of Great Britain.

<sup>79</sup> Wills, 93.

<sup>80</sup> For more on this, see below, Chapter IV.

<sup>81</sup> NAI DT/11654A, "Report on IRA internees," 3 June 1940.

of the IRA up to a certain point and while de Valera knew that the IRA would use them to target the U.K., his hope was that through internment and censorship, the anger and sense of betrayal felt by IRA men would wither on the vine.<sup>82</sup> When he took office, Eamon de Valera wrote to his Minister of Defense, Frank Aiken, saying:

...there was throughout the country a quantity of arms that had been used in the war of liberation... the Government announced that it would make no efforts to secure those arms until laws had been passed [to protect those militants who currently possessed arms]... when this had been done the arms should be confided to the public authorities.<sup>83</sup>

The official Free State policies on the IRA waffled between outright attack on the organization and quiet passivity regarding its operations. One good example of this duality is the case of intelligence files at Bere Island, one of the Treaty Ports surrendered to the Irish in 1939. During the withdrawal from the treaty ports in 1939, Irish Army Second Lieutenant John Griffin found a British Army intelligence file that laid out a list of IRA sympathizers and which directed that their property be burned. In addition, the file designated certain Irish families as pro-British. In 1939, the British government asked for the return of this file, which incriminated the British Army in the very trespasses that set them at odds with the IRA, if not with the Free State Government, and the people of Ireland. However, despite the fact that the Irish Government had access to this intelligence, it did not engage in the endlessly circular grudge-holding that categorized the IRA's relationship with the British Armed Forces, though neither did it return the intelligence. De Valera's speeches did not make reference to the burning of

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<sup>82</sup> NAI DT/S11564A. This report includes correspondence between Eamon de Valera that explicitly prohibits G2 (Irish intelligence service) from prosecuting or interning IRA members simply for possessing firearms. The Teoiseach's sentiment changes dramatically, however, after the raid at Magazine Fort in December 1939.

<sup>83</sup> NAI DT/S11564A, "Memo on the Policy of the Government with Regard to Offenses Against the State to Frank Aiken from Eamon de Valera."

houses at the hands of the British; in fact, when he referenced recent violence, he most often referred to the Irish Civil War, which had spilled markedly more Irish blood than the war with the U.K.<sup>84</sup> As the IRA was coming to terms with its post-Civil War agenda in the 1930s, so too was the Free State Government coming to terms with its policies on the IRA. Many of the IRA's members were simultaneously considered heroes of the war for independence and criminal violators of the new Free State's laws. The relationship between de Valera's government, the people of Eire, the British Government, and the IRA is complex and varies between individuals in each of those groups; however, due to his own and his Cabinet's closeness to the IRA personally, professionally, and culturally, de Valera's actions against the IRA proved more informed and more effective, unsurprisingly, than those of the Allies or the German Abwehr. This relationship likewise made the government in Eire hard to separate from the militant IRA in the eyes of British intelligence.<sup>85</sup>

*Republican News*, one of the IRA's many propaganda machines, wrote in 1940 that "Churchill is a champion liar, but he can't hold a candle to de Valera."<sup>86</sup> In another such propaganda piece, *War News* published in 1941, "Mr. de Valera had become a politician instead of a patriot."<sup>87</sup> Despite the IRA's poor opinion of the Fianna Fail government, de Valera's support of neutrality was echoed in the population and in the opposition political party, Fine Gael. In a speech to his party, Fine Gael leader Richard Mulcahy pointed out that, despite the large number of workers leaving Eire to support the British war effort (approximately 200,000 workers emigrated to the U.K. between 1939

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<sup>84</sup> Fisk, 39.

<sup>85</sup> The importance of this separation to policy and strategy is discussed in the conclusion.

<sup>86</sup> NAI DT/11654A. "*Republican News*," January 1940.

<sup>87</sup> NAI DFA/SEC A12, "IRA Activities." *War News*, February 1941. "Letter of Thanks from Chief of Staff Stephen Hayes."



and 1945), alliance with Britain would cost any political party in Ireland a tremendous voter base. The group of Irishmen Mulcahy was most concerned with, “that part with the greatest possible capacity for nuisance and damage,” was undeniably those emotionally, socially, culturally, and economically tied to the IRA.<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, the de Valera government undertook a policy that focused the Irish government’s attention inward, particularly through the development of the Garda and the G2. When viable, Dail Eirann supported the British war effort covertly. In September of 1939, as Hitler was invading Poland, British intelligence agencies had their eyes on Eire, and G2 entered into correspondence with Scotland Yard over the location of missing Republican leaders, among them Frank Ryan and Sean Russell.<sup>89</sup> However, the most overt means of support given to the Allied cause came in the form of The Emergency Powers Act of 1939.

The act permitted the Irish government to censor media and control elements of production in the country as a means to maintain peace while the world was at war. The Act was passed in response to the Christmas Raid on an Irish Army Magazine Fort in Dublin in which the IRA made off with several tons of weapons and ammunition. It was this attack, perhaps more than any of the IRA’s other crimes that prompted the Free State’s crusade against the IRA. Following the raid, de Valera presented a speech to Radio Eirann, saying, “the policy of patience has failed and is over...if the present law is not sufficient [to prevent violence] it will be strengthened.”<sup>90</sup> Perhaps the most glaring example of the tacit alliance between Fianna Fail and the British was that the Irish radio

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<sup>88</sup> Geoffrey Roberts, “The Challenge of the Irish Volunteers of World War II” from *War, Neutrality, and Irish Identities, 1939-1945* (blog), January 11, 2004, <http://www.reform.org/site/2004/01/11/irish-ww2>.

<sup>89</sup> NAI Department of Justice Papers (JUS) 8/752 “Report to Scotland Yard.”

<sup>90</sup> NAI DT/11654A.

station, Radio Eireann was prohibited by the Irish government from broadcasting weather forecasts in order to prohibit such information from being retrieved by German spies. More important to this radio silence, however, was the triangulation used by the Garda to isolate and raid IRA propaganda radio transmitters (many of which were paid for or provided by the German Abwehr). While the importance (for the Garda) of these seizures was the removal of the IRA message from the airwaves and the internment of the perpetrators, they routinely deprived inserted German spies the equipment necessary to perform their tasks.

As a result of the Garda's ongoing campaign against the IRA, the G2 was able to tacitly support the more experienced British SIS in intelligence gathering in Eire. Additionally, because German Abwehr agents chose to operate independently or with IRA assistance, the Garda's pre-existing strategies for ferreting out and interning IRA soldiers and sympathizers made them by far the most effective tool for snuffing out German intelligence operations in Eire.

The IRA's crisis of identity came to an end in 1938 with the return of Sean Russell to the organization. From 1927-1936, Russell was the IRA's Quartermaster General and the Army Council's staunchest advocate for expanded military action against England.<sup>91</sup> Russell was court-martialed by the Army Council in 1938 for misappropriation of organizational funds during his tour in the United States, where he met with Clann na Gael's Joseph MacGarrity, who shared Russell's militant views and had helped Germany attempt to smuggle guns to India during the First World War.<sup>92</sup> His court-martial was likely a personal reprisal for Russell's vocal opposition to IRA Chief of

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<sup>91</sup> Brian Hanley, *The IRA: A Documentary History 1916-2005* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Press, 2010), 65.

<sup>92</sup> Plowman, 81-105.

Staff Tom Barry, but in the IRA's general election in late 1938, Russell's friends and family in the organization voted to return him to the organization's inner circle. More importantly, the General Assembly also greenlit Russell's S-Plan. In a publication in the *Wolfe Tone Weekly* in late 1938, the IRA named itself the more valid government of Ireland and declared war on Britain.<sup>93</sup> For Britain, the conflict between Irish republicans and the U.K. was old news, and the Anglo-Irish War and the Irish Civil War had already, to the minds of British political leadership, forged a new Ireland for the Irish while permitting loyal subjects of the British crown to remain part of the United Kingdom.<sup>94</sup> As a result, this declaration was largely ignored. The declaration gave the British government four days to vacate Northern Ireland under threat of reprisal if they did not. The militant side of the plan was the result of debates between Russell and Barry. Barry suggested at the General Army Convention in 1938 that civilian targets in Northern Ireland be chosen for the bombing campaign. After having met with an Abwehr agent in Berlin in 1939, however, IRA representative and Russell's go-to munitions expert Seamus "Big Jim" O'Donovan reported back that terror bombing was discouraged by their German allies, and the IRA shifted its targets to British military and government targets in the UK.<sup>95</sup>

Beginning in November 1938 and continuing on and off through February 1940, the IRA engaged in a terror bombing campaign on British soil. The inexperience of IRA members with explosives, the underdevelopment of IRA military intelligence on its targets, and the unprofessionalism of the bombers themselves characterized the

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<sup>93</sup> NAI DT/S11564A, "IRA General Army Convention, 1938." See also "I.R.A. Take Over the Government of the Republic," *Wolfe Tone Weekly*, 17 December, 1938.

<sup>94</sup> PRO, CAB 65/1 "Meeting of the War Cabinet." 17 and 24 Oct 1939.

<sup>95</sup> Mark M. Hull, *Irish Secrets: German Espionage in Wartime Ireland 1939-1945* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), 43.

campaign. The S-Plan's first bombing attempt was on a British customs post in November 1938 that was empty and resulted in the deaths of three IRA members who were planting the bombs when they exploded, making them the attack's only casualties. On December 29<sup>th</sup>, the radio set used to communicate between IRA elements in Rathmines and those planting bombs in the U.K. was discovered and captured by the Garda, leaving those active elements on British soil without direct orders.<sup>96</sup> In February of 1940, an IRA arms dump and "armament school" was found and raided by Irish forces.<sup>97</sup> Additional tactical failures abounded throughout the campaign, including the apprehension by British authorities of the S-Plan itself, which was written down in detail and carried on the person of one of bombing perpetrators. Years after the war, "Big Jim" O'Donovan remarked about the S-Plan that it seemed "as if every IRA man that got arrested had made sure that he had a copy of all of our important [documents] on his person."<sup>98</sup> Following the increased visibility of the IRA as a result of the S-Plan, the Irish government was also able to effectively cripple the organization as the war went on. In March of 1940, the Garda arrested twenty-four IRA men. In August the police raided an IRA storehouse in Wicklow and apprehended a wireless radio set. In May of 1941 the Garda stormed an IRA meeting in Dublin and arrested twenty-eight IRA officers. By March of 1942, the IRA was experiencing defeat after defeat at the hands of the Irish Garda.<sup>99</sup> Claiming that the S-Plan failed tactically is easy enough, but for the purposes of understanding the plan's accurate reflection of IRA weakness, a strategic look at the plan is also necessary, if slightly more complicated.

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<sup>96</sup> NAI DT S11564A

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> David O'Donoghue, *The Devil's Deal: The IRA, Nazi Germany and the Double Life of Jim O'Donovan* (Dublin: New Island, 2010), 108.

<sup>99</sup> NAI DT S11564A

Russell's idea for the S-Plan was not to cripple the British infrastructure, or even to force a political reconsideration of Partition. Rather, through the deployment of Irishmen into Britain and the S-Plan bombings, Russell's hope was to prompt a military response into the Free State.<sup>100</sup> The Stormont Government<sup>101</sup> never viewed the IRA as a meaningful threat to Partition. In fact, in the face of war with Germany, having suffered through bombings from the Luftwaffe, conscription, and rationing, Northern Ireland never raised the issue of voting itself out of the United Kingdom. The Government of Ireland Act of 1920 permitted the government to hold a vote to remove itself from the UK, thus removing itself from the war and ostensibly siding with the neutral Irish or any other faction (though no other faction is a realistic possibility). However, despite having the right to vote itself out of the war, Northern Ireland held fast with Britain throughout the conflict.<sup>102</sup> If the German bombs could not twist the arm of the Unionists toward neutrality, it is unlikely the meager explosives that the IRA could muster would be likely to twist it all the way to unification. Additionally, IRA chiefs still looked to Northern Ireland as an occupied land; the struggle between Ulster Volunteers and Irish Republicans was not, in 1939, the violent monster that it would become in the late 1960s. Therefore, it was necessary to direct attacks not at Belfast, but into England proper.

While naturally Russell could not have known that Britain's military attention would be necessarily turned to Poland and Western Europe in 1939, the fact that the campaign continued well into 1940 suggests that Russell (by then Chief of Staff of the IRA) was poorly informed of the potential of the S-Plan to provoke the British.

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<sup>100</sup> Wills, 37.

<sup>101</sup> Stormont is the name given to the Parliament buildings in Northern Ireland and is the colloquial name of the Northern Irish government.

<sup>102</sup> Fisk, 43

Moreover, British intelligence, in the form of SIS and MI5, had essentially turned over policing of the IRA to the Irish intelligence bureau, G2. MI5 Chief Guy Liddell remarked in 1942, "as long as the police, and in particular the Metropolitan Police, are responsible for IRA activities in this country it seems to me that it is impossible for MI5 to attempt to obtain information about the organization."<sup>103</sup>

Because of Britain's inability to gather sufficient intelligence on the IRA, what resulted from the bombing campaign in Britain was the Prevention of Violence Act of July 1939. The law empowered the British Special Branch, MI5, to deport Irish citizens back to Eire. While the passage of the act demonstrates Britain's desire to contain Irish republicanism to Eire, there are other telling actions taken on behalf of the British intelligence community. While the still developing homeland security force, MI5, was notably successful in the detaining and deportation of German agents and the potential Irish fifth-column in the U.K., Special Branch's overseas division, the Secret Intelligence Service, was tragically underfunded and undermanned.<sup>104</sup> In an attempt to quell the violence of the S-Plan and operating on information gathered by SIS, Churchill secretly offered to concede Northern Ireland to de Valera in exchange for Eire's entrance into the war on behalf of the Allies.<sup>105</sup> The concession further demonstrates the British ignorance as to the state of the IRA and the balance of power in Eire, which had, by 1940, clearly shifted to the Fianna Fail government and away from the militant republican element. In fairness, while the S-Plan failed to prompt the military response that Sean Russell hoped for, it did have some success politically. Because of the nature of the terror attacks in

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<sup>103</sup> PRO, KV 2/233, "German Agents and Suspected Agents," 10 November, 1944.

<sup>104</sup> Hinsley, 166. At the outbreak of the war, SIS consisted of only six field officers to cover counter-intelligence operations in Sweden, France, Norway, Belgium, Scotland, and Eire.

<sup>105</sup> Longford, Earl of and T.P. O'Neill. *Eamon de Valera* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 365-368.

Britain, Parliament did consider the possibility of a united Ireland. Perhaps, if the world had not gone to war in 1939, the IRA's hopes of uniting Ireland by force might have been realized. De Valera ultimately declined the offer, and the Taoiseach maintained the image of Irish neutrality throughout the war, but the offer shows plainly that the War Cabinet was taking IRA violence seriously and that it was, as of 1939, not separating that violence from the interests of the Free State. It is clear that Partition was a powerful issue in the interwar relationship between Britain and Ireland; it was certainly the most important issue to the IRA. Britain mistakenly believed that it was the most important issue to Dublin.

The unintended, immediate result of the bombing campaign is that both the German and the British intelligence communities began to view the IRA as a serious force in Eire. Since neither organization had a window into the IRA's tumultuous leadership or its lack of training, each was forced to view the IRA through the lens of British police responses to the bombings and the newspaper coverage that painted the IRA as representative of the "true government of Eire."<sup>106</sup> In addition, MI5 and SIS were constantly in contest during the early years of the war. Nearly all of the German agents that deployed to the British mainland were apprehended; this lent morale capital to the Special Branch and contributed heavily to the belief that SIS actions in Eire would be similarly successful to those of MI5 in Britain.<sup>107</sup> However, because of Britain's inability to come to terms on the size and scope of its own security operations, German Abwehr agents were permitted largely to operate in Eire with impunity. Because the Abwehr had

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<sup>106</sup> Dail Eireann Debates. Houses of the Oireachtas, [debates.oireachtas.ie](http://debates.oireachtas.ie), 2 March 1939.

<sup>107</sup> Both Hinsley's multi-volume work *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (1990) and Christopher Andrew's *Defend the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2009), heavily praise MI5's knowledge of German spies in Eire, though very few apprehensions, arrests, or internments in Eire came as a result of British intelligence operations on the island.

targeted the IRA as its natural ally in Eire, SIS was left largely hamstrung; it lacked the authority to apprehend citizens of Eire.<sup>108</sup> As a result of the IRA's bombings in Britain (and later Eire and Northern Ireland), the British Special Branch, SIS and MI5, saw the war for intelligence in Eire as inexplicably tied to Irish republicanism and the IRA. It was, however, utterly unable to stop the influx of German spies and saboteurs into Eire. The Germans, too, took notice of the attacks and the publicity they received. They sent agent Oscar Pfaus to make contact with the IRA, thus beginning a disastrous affair between Abwehr saboteurs and the IRA.

The splintered nature of the IRA and its inability to fight effectively for a united Ireland was a politically accepted reality in Eire and Northern Ireland in the 1930s. Why then did Britain and the United States discuss the IRA as a strategic concern during the Second World War? Why did U.S. Ambassador David Gray equate the IRA's declaration of war against the English as a declaration of "war against the United States?"<sup>109</sup> The answer is in the spiteful treatment of Irish military issues by Winston Churchill. Churchill had made a career, albeit a failed one, in banging the drum of national defense against European political maneuvers. With regard to Irish Question, as it was called during the Partition debates, Churchill found yet another place where foresight and stubbornness meld so thoroughly it is difficult to say which was the cause of his antagonism toward later Irish neutrality. Churchill railed against the return of the Treaty Ports to the Free State government because he believed that the installations gave Eire the leverage necessary to bargain Irish involvement in war for the surrender of

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<sup>108</sup> For an in-depth explanation of Special Branch infighting at the start of the Second World War, see Andrew, *Defend the Realm* (2009).

<sup>109</sup> NAI JUS 8/940. "Letter from David Gray to Eamon de Valera entitled, 'Manifesto Regarding U.S. Troops in Ireland, 1942.'"



Ulster. In a debate in Parliament, then First Lord Churchill, challenged the decision to surrender the ports, saying:

Under this Agreement, it seems to me more than probable... that Mr. de Valera's Government will at some supreme moment of emergency demand the surrender of Ulster as an alternative to declaring neutrality... You hope in their place to have good will, strong enough to endure tribulation for your sake. Suppose you have it not. It will be no use saying, "Then we will retake the ports." You will have no right to do so. To violate Irish neutrality should it be declared at the moment of a great war may put you out of court in the opinion of the world.<sup>110</sup>

This and other premonitions served to create a confidence in Churchill that he, once Prime Minister, was able to capitalize on throughout the war. In regard to the IRA and Eire, however, his premonitions were incorrect. The Free State never leveraged neutrality against the return of Ulster; in fact the opposite was true. Britain attempted to leverage Ulster against neutrality. In another case, Churchill was convinced that German U-boats were being refueled in Eire; a logistical impossibility as Eire barely had oil to keep the lights on in Dublin and farmers throughout the country were burning turf for fuel.<sup>111</sup> Churchill's fiery attitudes toward Eire are sometimes excused on the grounds of ignorance, however, it is important to point out that in many cases, the Prime Minister used informed and practical language to communicate with the Free State; in military matters, however, Churchill's was personally offended by de Valera's hard-nosed negotiation over the Treaty Ports and this informed his emotional and impractical consideration of threats from Ireland. This impressionistic belief in the power of Irish dissidents combined with the extensive stock that the British and the Americans placed in Churchill's strategic prowess. That he was wrong about Eire's potential in the Second

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<sup>110</sup> Mansergh op. cit., 384, quoting House of Commons Debates Vol 335 coll 1094-1105 (5.5.38) cited in Fisk, 38.

<sup>111</sup> For Churchill's suspicions, see Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War Vol. 1: The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), 662. For Eire's economic troubles and its immediate connection to the British economy in the Second World War, see Wills, 222.

World War could not be seen past the fact that Churchill was so right about the collapse of negotiations with Hitler on the continent. As a result, the Prime Minister took a personal interest in intelligence and espionage in Eire, believing that it was a hotbed of dissident activity to be used by the Nazis. The next chapter will discuss exactly how ill informed this perspective was.

When the reality of the war clashed against the perceived potential of the IRA, shortly after the postponement of Operation Sea Lion, Abwehr insertion into and British intelligence interests in Eire fell off entirely. The next chapter will investigate the extent of the intelligence war that took place in Eire during the Second World War.

## CHAPTER IV

## REACTIONS

In the previous chapters, this thesis has discussed the reasons why the Great Powers misconstrued the power of the Irish Republican Army. Namely, the international quality of the organization made it high profile for British intelligence. Its overly ambitious bombing campaign at the beginning of the war made it high profile for the Germans. This chapter will discuss more specifically the actions taken by the British, American, and German governments to contain or use the IRA. These actions are important because while the IRA may have been a prolific international organization, if the Great Powers ignored the organization, then its importance has been understated with good cause. This chapter will argue that, to the contrary, the IRA factored into the strategic considerations of the Great Powers in important ways. Between the British and American allies, the strategic assets of the Free State were important to North Atlantic operations. For the Germans, the geographic proximity of Eire to the U.K. was too tempting to ignore. The Free State was surrounded on all sides and occupied internally by forces that seemed capable of wrenching her hard won freedom away. For all three, the Allies, the Axis, and the Irish, the IRA proved a major obstacle.

In 1939, the British War Cabinet under Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain met to discuss the situation in Northern Ireland. Specifically, it discussed the rise in violence perpetrated by Irish nationalist republicans and debated whether or not the issue was one in which the British government should intervene. At this meeting, the Home Secretary, Sir John Anderson, informed the Cabinet that this violence was "a development of Imperial policy and not of local policy." The violence was indeed, as it was part of

Russell's S-Plan. It was decided, however, that Northern Ireland should handle the IRA and the political violence. The cabinet informed the Stormont government that these matters were "a matter of maintaining local order."<sup>112</sup> This early decision is interesting, as it sets the stage for the British treatment of Eire and Irish political violence throughout the war. No such message was sent to the de Valera government, nor was the transmission of such a message discussed. As the war grew more dire, Britain's most pressing need from the Free State was the use of that country's southern ports. To secure these, the War Cabinet under Chamberlain and under Churchill heard a number of suggestions, each of which mired in the trouble of dealing with the IRA.

Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, made it clear in 1939 that he believed "the time had come to make it clear to the Eire Government that [Britain] must have the use of these harbours, and intended in any case to use them."<sup>113</sup> Churchill's aggression and willingness to make a unilateral decision with regard to the Free State was a recurring theme in the War Cabinet meetings throughout the war. Churchill was convinced that the Irish were providing succor to German U-boats, and he was prepared to take Eire's southern ports if they would not give them willingly. This option was ultimately discouraged by the Secretary of Dominion Affairs and by Dublin representative to the Crown Sir John Maffey. Both men suggested that if Britain were to make forcible use of the ports, Eire would not likely resist with military force directly, but would "indict [Britain] before the world and rally [the Irish people] people against us."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> PRO, CAB 65/1/6, "War Cabinet 6 (89)," 6 September, 1939, 40.

<sup>113</sup> PRO, CAB 65/1/50, "War Cabinet 50 (39)," 17 October, 1939, 411.

<sup>114</sup> PRO, CAB 65/1/58, "War Cabinet 58 (39)," 24 October, 1939, 486.

In addition to these concerns, the Lord Privy Seal remarked in a similar meeting in November of that year that despite the presence of Secret Intelligence agents in Eire, he was concerned that the IRA “provided just the sort of organisation which the Germans could use.”<sup>115</sup> The Cabinet reflected that increasing its intelligence resources in Eire in order to detect either German or Irish republican sabotage was dangerous and opted instead to rely on a pre-existing relationship with the Garda intelligence chief, Colonel Liam Archer.

This decision reflects the prominent fear of the fragile relationship between Britain, Eire, and the IRA. It was the Cabinet’s belief that Colonel Archer indeed had at his disposal, “the whole machinery of the Eire Government” with which to gather intelligence and pass that intelligence to Britain. British intelligence chiefs wanted to hold on to this valuable asset, to be sure. However, there was a clear concern to maintain the secrecy of already embedded British intelligence assets.<sup>116</sup> The concern was that if Britain were discovered to be harvesting intelligence in Eire, the IRA would be given even more traction in its war against Britain.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, the Intelligence chiefs regarded the Irish police service as “very efficient” and felt that “anything in the nature of a large Secret Intelligence Service [in Ireland] would very soon be discovered.”<sup>118</sup> Interestingly enough, however, the War Cabinet never considered that the Garda might be effective enough to contain the IRA.

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<sup>115</sup> PRO CAB 65/4/19, “W.M. (39) 92<sup>nd</sup> Conclusions, Minute 6. Confidential Annex,” 112.

<sup>116</sup> These assets are not discussed specifically because the interest in keeping their identity secret and the consequences of their exposure is more relevant to the thesis than the assets themselves or the interwar mission of those assets.

<sup>117</sup> PRO CAB 65/4/19, 2.

<sup>118</sup> PRO CAB 65/4/24, “W.M. (39) 104<sup>th</sup> Conclusions, Minute 8. Confidential Annex,” 144.

By December of 1939 the situation on the Irish coast had become dire. German U-boat sightings in the Atlantic had become so common in Eire that they "ceased to rouse attention" from the local populace. As a result, the Cabinet approved a Secret Intelligence organization to operate in Eire and perform coast watching.<sup>119</sup> When German successes in Europe continued, the concern over Eire became more grave. The Cabinet suggested that the whole of Ireland might be taken by as few as two thousand German soldiers and that diplomatic talks between the Prime Minister and de Valera should be changed in tone from one of intelligence cooperation to one of direct involvement. It was considered unlikely that de Valera would throw aside neutrality altogether, but the British believed they saw clearly that the IRA was a key element in the German war plans. The British insisted on the rounding up of IRA men in Eire (ironically, a process already several years underway by 1940), and the interment of Germans there as well. The British position was most clear by June 16, 1940. In a meeting that month, Churchill discussed the proposed pressure to be placed on Eire, and its potential consequences:

If this [the arrest and internment] precipitated a rebellion, as it well might, so much the better. The Eire army would then be fighting the IRA and upsetting the German arrangements.<sup>120</sup>

It is important to note that during the war, the War Cabinet under Churchill was quick to point out that pushing Eire too hard would likely not provoke a military response against Britain but would instead push the Irish Army into the hands of the IRA.<sup>121</sup> The meetings in which the War Cabinet discussed military action in Eire were not even superficially concerned with a military response from the Irish Army or the Local

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<sup>119</sup> PRO CAB 65/4/28, "W.M. (39) 120<sup>th</sup> Conclusions, Minute 11. Confidential Annex," 159.

<sup>120</sup> PRO CAB 65/7/63, "War Cabinet 168 (40)," 16 June 1940, 480.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 481.

Defense Forces (LDF), but were cautious about taking what they needed from Ireland due to the potential of the IRA not only to “indict” them to the world but also to mount a dangerous insurgency. As a result of this fear, a full-scale occupation of Eire, though often suggested by Churchill (both as First Lord of the Admiralty and as Prime Minister), was never ordered. Instead, SIS and MI6 spies were sent into Eire to perform intelligence gathering and counter-intelligence, with the cooperation of Colonel Archer in G2. The War Cabinet, for its part, continued to pressure de Valera and the Government diplomatically and politically.

Talks with de Valera proved most unhelpful. Not only did the Taoiseach display a characteristic stubbornness in regard to conceding to British requests, but also the very idea of engaging in diplomatic measures with Eire created troubles for the War Cabinet in Northern Ireland. In a meeting on 28 June, 1940, the Cabinet received a message from Lord James Craig, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Craigavon, the Prime Minister of the Stormont government in Northern Ireland. Lord Craigavon expressed his anger and surprise at the idea of such negotiations, and demanded to be included in these negotiations. Churchill promptly sent a ciphered message to the Stormont government informing them that little progress on that front (that is, talks with de Valera) was expected, but that no actions would be taken that might affect Northern Ireland without Stormont’s input. That the message sent to Northern Ireland was ciphered is particularly interesting, and its secrecy is telling of the passive hopes of the British government that progress could, in fact, be made in discussing the Treaty Ports with de Valera.<sup>122</sup> Had Garda radio monitors discovered that Churchill had offered Stormont a say in what transpired between Britain

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<sup>122</sup> PRO CAB 65/7/81, “War Cabinet 186 (40),” 28 June 1940, 639.

and Eire, it is not hard to imagine a rapid collapse in negotiations between London and Dublin.

The next month, the war cabinet held a meeting to discuss how they might “do their best to obtain the assent of the Ulster Government,” demonstrating their (the Cabinet’s) desire to achieve their goals in working with Eire and their willingness to deprioritize Lord Craigavon’s concerns. The minutes of the meeting demonstrate that the Cabinet was interested in “doing their best,” but that the concerns of Eire were ultimately more important to the war effort, and, if Craigavon could not assent, then Craigavon could wait.<sup>123</sup> In fact, the Lord President, Neville Chamberlain, was asked to travel to Dublin personally and await a conversation with de Valera over the particulars of Britain’s proposed deal with Eire. Chamberlain was further instructed to provide an “informal” letter to Craigavon laying out the general expectations of this meeting. However, in the same meeting, the Cabinet realized that while Chamberlain was essentially going to Dublin just to take de Valera’s temperature on the issue of collusion, that action was likely to be construed as “an offer.” Chamberlain was empowered, in such a situation, to close the deal and get use of the ports.<sup>124</sup>

While Britain may seem to have been willing to destroy its relationship with Ireland (North and South) over the Treaty Ports, it is worthwhile to discuss briefly what Britain offered in return. On July 19<sup>th</sup>, Chamberlain returned with his report. His talk with de Valera confirmed that the Dublin government was concerned most with the possibility of a British invasion. De Valera’s fear was that, due to the violence perpetrated by the S-Plan and because of the tenuous position of Eire geographically, that

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<sup>123</sup> PRO CAB 65/7/77, “War Cabinet 182 (40),” 24 June 1940, 609.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.



Britain would disregard Eire's claims to self-determination and occupy her in the name of war. De Valera's second concern was equally grave; that Germany would do the same thing. The War Cabinet decided to supply the Irish with war materiel in order to sway Irish public opinion back toward the British and to draw the Irish government into believing that a German invasion was more likely.<sup>125</sup> Earlier that month, Joseph Walshe informed the crown's minister to Dublin, Sir John Maffey, that the Irish government would ignore any attacks against Axis ships that took place in Irish territorial waters. Walshe said the government in Eire could "turn a blind eye to any such action...provided [British] activities were conducted in such a way as not to excite comment."<sup>126</sup> While the Dublin government never agreed to give over the treaty ports, this concession did permit the British navy to engage and destroy any enemy warships found off the coast of Ireland, and, since most of the coast-watching groups that the SIS had observed lacked even the most basic materiel, the chances of "exciting comment" was quite low. During the meeting in which John Maffey's report was received, the Cabinet approved a proposal to contact President Franklin Roosevelt that, "in order to forestall German action," the British were considering a radical change in their policy toward Eire.<sup>127</sup>

The radical change was that after 1941, British policy in the Eire became cooperative. If the treaty ports could not be obtained, the collusion of the Free State Government would suffice. This collusion had to be hidden, however, for fear of exciting comment from the IRA.

The question of Irish neutrality is becoming more important as historians of the Second World War look to smaller states to see the social, political, and intellectual

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<sup>125</sup> PRO CAB 65/8/20, "War Cabinet 208 (40)," 19 July 1940, 130.

<sup>126</sup> PRO CAB 65/8/6, "War Cabinet 194 (40)," 5 July 1940, 43.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

impact of the conflict. Holly Case's *Between States* offers points out "small states matter. The perspective of small states places the struggle for mastery among Europe's Great Powers in a new and perhaps chastening perspective."<sup>128</sup> Similarly, the struggles that the de Valera government faced over maintaining neutrality shines some light on the political, if not material, importance of the IRA.

It is generally accepted that neutrality was the only realistic political and military option for Ireland during the Second World War.<sup>129</sup> However, economic necessities, physical proximity, and cultural and familial ties to Britain caused Ireland to abandon neutrality, if not explicitly. These connections between Britain and Ireland clashed with tensions between the Fianna Fail government and the country's radical republican elements embodied by the IRA. The IRA was banned as in 1936 and had undergone a substantial reorganization by 1941.

Under the leadership of Sean Russell, the most militant of IRA gunmen and politicians were still quite active. The group's commitment to violence against the British from 1937 to the beginning of the war prompted German Abwehr decision makers to approach the group as a means by which to deny Ireland to Britain geographically and politically.<sup>130</sup> The IRA's collusion with the Third Reich became an elephant in the room that no official government could discuss openly. The Irish government could not risk

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<sup>128</sup> Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>129</sup> This case has been made consistently over the last forty years of scholarship on the topic. See Carolle J. Carter, *The Shamrock and the Swastika: German Espionage in Ireland in World War II* (Palo Alto, California: Pacific Books, 1973), Robert Fisk, *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster, and the Price of Neutrality 1939-45* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), Brian Girvin, *The Emergency: Neutral Ireland 1939-45* (Oxford: Pan Macmillan, 2006), Clair Wills, *That Neutral Island: A Cultural History of Ireland During the Second World War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), and Paul McMahon, *British Spies and Irish Rebels: British Intelligence in Ireland 1916-1945* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2008).

<sup>130</sup> Hull, 41.

confirming Axis espionage operations for fear of Allied invasion, the German government could not risk confirming these operations for fear of pushing Ireland into the arms of the Allies, and the U.S. and Britain could not interfere in Irish affairs without damaging their claims to support democracy. As a result, Ireland engaged in the censorship of free press and in secret arrangements with both Britain and the United States in order to fulfill her political obligations and to simultaneously reinforce a popular image of self-determinism and non-belligerence.

However, as Clair Wills points out, while Ireland was able to force some distance between itself and Britain politically, the reality of limited Irish agricultural and industrial production and its reliance on British goods created problems for the kind of absolute neutrality to which de Valera and Fianna Fail had committed the country.<sup>131</sup> Among these problems, motivating young Irish men to serve in the Local Defense Forces rather than joining the British Army and the draw of working Irishmen in Britain's war industries proved specifically problematic for the Fianna Fail party. Additionally, there was, within the Dail, a persistent attitude among Fianna Fail's opponents that Ireland, by virtue of its reliance on Britain's economy, owed a debt of service to the nation as it entered the war.<sup>132</sup> The extent of Ireland's reliance on Britain is evident in March of 1939, when in a correspondence between Ireland's minister to Berlin, Charles Bewley, and the Minister of External Affairs, Joseph Walshe. Bewley was a solicitor and supporter of German National Socialism, and wrote to the Free State government about his efforts to build favorable relations between Ireland and Germany. Walshe instructed

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<sup>131</sup> For Ireland's reliance and a breakdown of Irish production problems during the Second World War, see Chapter 3, "Mobilization" in Clair Wills. *That Neutral Island: A Cultural History of Ireland During the Second World War* (The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

Bewley to look for markets outside of Britain, and the Dublin minister informed Walshe that Ireland was importing 11.3 times as much as they were exporting to countries other than Britain, Northern Ireland, and Germany. The desire of the Free State was to establish a more favorable trade ratio with Germany, and Bewley pressed Germany for a ratio of 2:3. In this radical suggestion, it is clear that the Free State Government may have looked at Germany as a market, but the demand for a balance of trade with Germany was inconsistent with Ireland's economic engagements elsewhere. Bewley recalled a conversation with an Irish industrialist in Berlin who pointed out that Ireland was willing to buy goods from Sweden without any stipulation that Sweden should buy Irish goods, yet the state insisted that a ratio of 2:3 should exist between Ireland and Germany. The half-hearted attempt to maintain this favorable relationship is indicative of Ireland's reliance on British markets. The Free State wanted to capitalize on the German market, but since it was already exporting the vast majority of its goods to Britain, Ireland's choice of what side of the Second World War to take was largely decided for her despite support for Germany among some elements of the Irish government.

Walshe's desire for economic cooperation with Germany had political underpinnings. The minister advised that the German Press should be approached about "securing publicity for the campaign against the Partition of Ireland."<sup>133</sup> However, the Free State was unwilling to press its own media machine to support rising German anti-British propaganda. In his letter to Walshe, Bewley writes:

Various German officials had mentioned to me their very great regret at the anti-German attitude of the press in Ireland, and suggested that it could scarcely be expected that the German press should help an Irish campaign for reunion while

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<sup>133</sup> NAI, DFA 219/22, "Note on the Irish Legation in Berlin from Charles Bewley to Joseph P. Walshe (Dublin). 49/31." 28 March 1939.

the Irish press considered itself at liberty to indulge in abuse of the German state and its rulers.<sup>134</sup>

The Department of External Affairs, however, indicated to Bewley that it did not propose to restrain the Irish newspapers from commenting as they desired on the policy of the German government, despite a massive censorship campaign that was already taking place in Ireland regarding war news.<sup>135</sup> Bewley was frustrated with his task, pointing out that “the chief obstacle at present is not on the German, but on the Irish, side, notably the attacks on Germany in the Irish papers and particularly in the Irish Press, which the authorities have regard as expressing the views of the Irish Government.”<sup>136</sup> The Irish Government never portrayed an openly anti-German perspective, but its duplicitous methods in dealing with Germany and its unwillingness to condone any of Bewley’s plans indicates its incentives in supporting British interests. Additionally, it should be noted that these correspondences demonstrate that as early as 1939, German officials were staying informed on Irish affairs through the Irish press. Bewley’s experience in Germany also shows that early in the war, the Germans had the opportunity to see that the Free State would not be a willing ally.

The collaboration between the Free State and British authorities also demonstrates in measurable ways the extent to which Ireland was unable to maintain full neutrality, especially once the IRA began looking to foreign nations for assistance in its own war against Britain. This is important because Allied leaders, particularly Churchill and U.S. Ambassador to Ireland David Gray, viewed Irish neutrality in 1939 as political

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> The censorship campaign existed in order to curb enthusiasm for the war. The hope was to reduce the number of Irishmen emigrating in order to join the British Army for work. For a discussion on Irish censorship, see Chapter 5, “War in the Air” in Wills, or Donal O’Drisceoil. *Censorship in Ireland, 1939-1945: Neutrality, Politics, and Society* (Cork University Press, 1995).

<sup>136</sup> NAI, DFA 219/22.

opportunism.<sup>137</sup> By 1940, Britain's defeat at the hands of the Germans seemed inevitable, as evidenced by Joseph Walshe's letter to de Valera in June of that year, saying, "neither time nor gold can beat Germany."<sup>138</sup> The Fianna Fail government never provided assistance to the Axis, and did not change its attitude in the wake of what seemed inevitable German victory. Churchill was convinced the German U-boats were being refueled on the coast of Ireland, but this suspicion rested more on Churchill's personal frustrations over the return of the Treaty Ports in 1939, which he had vehemently opposed, than on Ireland's opportunism.<sup>139</sup> Quite the contrary, Ireland's neutrality belied not only a working, economic relationship with Britain but also an ideological alignment between Ireland and her former oppressor.

Unfortunately, de Valera's vision was not one that militant Irish republicans shared. Since the IRA was unable to push the Free State government into open war against the British, the organization threw its lot in with Germany to throw Britain from Ireland. The relationship between Irish republicans and Germany predates the Second World War and has some roots in the First World War, both with the well publicized Roger Casement affair and with the less publicized Indo-Irish conspiracy in which Irish-American republicans under the leadership of Clan na Gael's Joseph McGarrity attempted to smuggle weapons to India during its revolution against the Crown.<sup>140</sup> Throughout the war, the Free State government took a number of measures to control IRA activity, including the passage of laws that suspended the due process of individuals

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<sup>137</sup> For Churchill's attitudes, see Thomas Jones. *Whitehall Diary, Vol III.* ed Keith Middlemass (OUP) London, 1971. For David Gray's perspective, see PRO CAB 66/40/37.

<sup>138</sup> "Memorandum to the Taoiseach." 21 June 1940. Cited in Robert Fisk. "Survival of the Neutral – Ireland's Second World War," *The Independent*, December 4, 2010.

<sup>139</sup> For Churchill's suspicions, see Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War Vol. 1: The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), 662.

<sup>140</sup> Plowman, 81-105.

suspected of offences against the state. This resulted in the internment of over a thousand suspected republicans from 1939-45 with between four and six hundred being in captivity at any given point of the war.<sup>141</sup>

This action was hardly unfounded. In July of 1940, the Germans attempted a landing of three agents, two of Indian descent and one German, who were promptly apprehended and arrested by Irish authorities who spotted their vessel while it was still at sea. These agents carried explosive bombs and sabotage equipment intended for IRA-supported bombing missions in the UK, thought by SIS to be headed for Northern Ireland, but more likely headed for Britain.<sup>142</sup> Gunter Shutz landed in Eire in March of 1941 with orders to provide information on the condition of Great Britain, particularly with regard to the effectiveness of Operation Bernhard, a counterfeiting operation designed to weaken the British pound. Though Shutz was quickly captured, his almost immediate escape left him at large for two months before he was brought back to the newly established internment camp at Athlone barracks.<sup>143</sup> Shutz had found refuge at the home of Mrs. Cathal Brugha, widow of the Irish patriot and a known IRA sympathizer.<sup>144</sup>

Throughout the war, Abwehr agents of all stripes found succor, cash, and assistance amongst the IRA. The most famous of these agents was Herman Goertz, who parachuted into Ireland wearing his German Army uniform, complete with his World War I medals and honors. Goertz met with several IRA members and was given refuge in their safe houses, where he set up a radio set in the home of IRA notable Stephen Held. Held's home was promptly raided and Goertz's notes on the potential German-supported

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<sup>141</sup> NAI, DT S11564A.

<sup>142</sup> PRO KV 2/1296, "Otto Dietergaertner," 1.

<sup>143</sup> PRO KV 2/1298. This file is labeled "Hans Marchner" but Marchner is the South African alias of Gunter Shutz.

<sup>144</sup> PRO KV 2/1300, "Gunter Max Oscar Schutz," 1.

invasion of Northern Ireland, called Plan Kathleen, were discovered, along with his radio. Goertz went on the run and was apprehended in Dublin in 1941, along with a number of other IRA members. In proper spy form, he ingested a cyanide tablet in custody after divulging his entire plan and an account of all of his actions in Eire.<sup>145</sup>

Ironically, even when the IRA operations and German intelligence operations were not directly bound up together, the local struggles between the de Valera government and the IRA caused considerable troubles for inserted agents. In the summer of 1940, one of the Abwehr's more successful agents, Walter Simon, came ashore in Ireland's Dingle Bay and managed to hide his radio set. While riding on a train to Dublin, the agent was asked by some local men if he was waiting on a man from the IRA. He jokingly responded, "Are you from the IRA?" and they arrested him for being a member of the then-outlawed organization. He was turned over to the authorities where he was searched; his secret messages (which he'd sewn into his clothes) were uncovered and he was arrested and spent the remainder of the war in Mountjoy Prison.<sup>146</sup> This story was a typical one. Ireland's homeland security forces waged an effective war against the IRA from 1939-1945; German spies found themselves simply allied to the losing side.

The strategic implications of the alliance were not lost on the Allied intelligence services. As a result, the Fianna Fail government was pressured from Britain and the United States to curb the IRA trouble. One of the government's most important pieces of legislation to accomplish this task was Free State's Offenses Against the State Act. This act permitted the Irish government to censor media and control elements of its production. It was passed in response to the Christmas Raid on an Irish Army Magazine

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<sup>145</sup> PRO KV 2/1322, "Hermann Goertz," 1.

<sup>146</sup> David Kahn. *Hitler's Spies: German Military Intelligence in World War II* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 1978), 305.



Fort in Dublin in which the IRA made off with several tons of weapons and ammunition. Following the raid, de Valera presented a speech to Radio Eirann, saying, "The policy of patience has failed and is over...if the present law is not sufficient [to prevent violence] it will be strengthened."<sup>147</sup> The crusade against the IRA led to perhaps the most glaring example of the tacit alliance between Fianna Fail and the British. Under the Act, Radio Eirann was prohibited from broadcasting weather forecasts in order to prevent such information from being retrieved by German spies. The broadcast of the weather had virtually no effect on the apprehension, monitoring, or conviction of IRA terrorists. The radio silence was specifically designed to protect Allied strategic interests. More important to this radio silence, however, was the triangulation used by the Garda to isolate and raid IRA propaganda radio transmitters, many of which were paid for or provided by the German Abwehr.<sup>148</sup> The importance of these seizures for the Garda was the removal of the IRA message from the airwaves and the internment of the perpetrators, but they routinely deprived German spies the equipment necessary to perform their tasks.

The result of the clandestine sabotage perpetrated by German spies in Ireland was that de Valera was faced with a dangerous balancing act. By accepting outright British assistance in policing not only German spies, but also Irish rebels (to borrow from Paul McMahon)<sup>149</sup>, de Valera would have risked compromising the independence that he had personally fought for in the Anglo-Irish War. By refusing British cooperation, he risked the collapse of the most fundamental economic relationship to the Free State.

Additionally, after 1940, there was a fear of invasion not from the Germans but from the

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<sup>147</sup> NAI DT/11654A

<sup>148</sup> Specifically, Abwehr II, Nazi Germany's intelligence service specializing in international sabotage. For more on IRA and German collusion, see Carolle J. Carter's *The Shamrock and the Swastika* (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1977).

<sup>149</sup> *British Spies and Irish Rebels* is the title of Paul McMahon's book on the subject.

Allies, who saw IRA collusion with the Abwehr as cause for occupying Ireland. One must also keep in mind that de Valera himself was a republican at heart. The crusade against the IRA was not an ideological problem, but a practical one. De Valera saw the IRA as too violent and criminal, despite his sympathy with their cause. In 1935, de Valera denied Garda requests for permission to conduct manhunts for IRA men based on intelligence that they were armed with weapons left over from the Irish Civil War.<sup>150</sup>

In a letter from U.S. Ambassador to Ireland David Gray to Taoiseach de Valera in September of 1943, he detailed the U.S. disappointment in the Free State's neutrality. At that point, the U.S. had given Ireland 20,000 rifles as well as two cargo ships, both of which had been consequently sunk by the Axis powers en route to Ireland. Perhaps the most interesting of the Ambassador's complaints, however, is his attention to the IRA. He informed the Taoiseach, "The IRA has issued a manifesto declaring war against the United States [as a result of the U.S. stationing of troops in Northern Ireland] and is presumably at war with us in conjunction with the Axis allies."<sup>151</sup> The United States, through Ambassador Gray, declared that Ireland was acting counter to its own interests. Gray felt that Ireland's place was with the Allies due to a longstanding familial tie between Irish Americans and the Irish. Churchill was virulently opposed to Irish neutrality, even though Britain continued to reap economic and political benefits from its relationship with Ireland. However, Ireland feared invasion not only from Germany but also from the Allies, as well as the danger of civil war erupting from its more radical republican population. In the end, Fianna Fail's challenge was to appear neutral and non-belligerent. The reality of her position was to be hidden from everyone who was looking.

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<sup>150</sup> NAI DT S11564A

<sup>151</sup> PRO, CAB 66/40/37, "Letter from David Gray to Eamon de Valera."

This duplicity was not isolated to the office of the Taoiseach, either. In 1944, James Dillon, the Dail's representative from West Donegal, made a comment to the Dail on the U.S.'s request that Eire deport German and Japanese legation representatives. Dillon supported the suggestion, and throughout his speech refers to Eire's interests "within the Commonwealth." The importance of this language cannot be ignored, given that in 1937 Eire had all but declared its exit from the Commonwealth with its new Constitution. Dillon went on to say, "Unless [we] come up with a way to live with the British, there is no hope of dissolving the Border." It is clear that by 1944, Eire was firmly in the Allied corner.<sup>152</sup>

The investigation of the Free State's actions to preserve the image of Irish neutrality opens new resources through which to view the importance of the Irish Republican Army in the Second World War. Firstly, the British Government, as seen through the War Office, Home Office, and Cabinet records, acted cautiously with regard to the Free State, fearful that the country was volatile due to the movements of IRA terrorists. Because of this fear, Churchill's more aggressive plans to simply take from Eire what Britain needed in the war were discouraged. It was the IRA, then, that incentivized the British to respect Irish neutrality and attempt to work with, rather than against, the Free State. Secondly, the Germans saw the IRA as a potential sabotage platform in Eire, for use either in the U.K. or in Eire herself. Since many of the Abwehr II's records were destroyed during or in the wake of the war, it is only by looking into de Valera's troubles with Germany over neutrality that the central position of the IRA in that relationship is visible.

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<sup>152</sup> CAB 66/54/27 "War Cabinet Report for the Month of July 1944 for the Dominions, India, Burma, and the Colonies." 28 August, 1944, 6.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

The question of what place should be accorded to the IRA during the Second World War is complex. This thesis has demonstrated that, as a strategic consideration, the IRA deserves a place in the narrative of Britain and Germany's war in the North Atlantic. However, further investigation into the organization and, more importantly, in the reactions to the organization from other, greater military powers, is likely to yield insights that current scholars of international policy, terrorism, and counter-insurgency will find valuable. The experiences of great powers (mainly the U.K. and the United States) with the Irish Republican Army is of use to scholars of counter-insurgency because they offer comparisons to other, more high-profile insurgent conflicts. Militant Irish republicanism has persisted since the 18<sup>th</sup> century; therefore, Britain's responses to it provide a backdrop for the consideration of other insurgent conflicts. This is helpful mostly because it allows for the consideration of insurgent conflicts and counter-insurgency outside of a vacuum. David Galula's *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* provides a cornerstone study of counterinsurgency, but the armed, insurgent struggles between Britain and Ireland existed long before, during, and long after France's conflict in Algeria. The policies and practices of prosecuting modern counter-insurgency all exist in the foreground of British conflicts in Ireland. While this does not mean that anti-IRA operations necessarily inform COIN operations around the world, it does mean that Irish insurgency offers a wealth of comparative opportunities for future research. These comparisons extend beyond COIN and are similarly useful in the development of the historiography of terrorism.

In his 1995 book, *Fighting Terrorism*, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described with great zeal how democracies could defeat radical, international terrorist cells. In the foreword to the 2001 edition, published after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in New York, he offered a few prescriptions on how to accomplish victory against terrorists, one of which is to “consider the terrorists enemies of mankind, to [give them] no quarter and no consideration for their purported grievances.”<sup>153</sup> Netanyahu’s suggestion here is indicative of an historiographical theory on the consideration of terrorism (and subsequently counter-insurgency), one that gauges a great power’s success in dealing with smaller, asymmetrical forces in terms of the destruction of the smaller force. This suggestion is as sad as it is interesting, particularly considering Netanyahu’s next paragraph:

This same clarity enabled the Allies to root out Nazism in the twentieth century. They did not look for the “root cause”... of Nazism—because they knew that some acts are evil in and of themselves.

Unfortunately, this statement is barely, if at all, true. This history of British intelligence throughout the interwar years demonstrates that the “clarity” needed to destroy a state or its government comes only after nearly a decade of trying other options. In the example of the British relationship with the IRA and the Free State, the “clarity” necessary to invade and to give the IRA “no quarter” has, of this writing, still not come. Granted, there is a level of ferocity in the rhetoric surrounding the defeat of terrorism, and granted that that rhetoric was at its pinnacle in 2001. However, the methods that Britain has used since the late nineteenth century to combat Irish republican violence

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<sup>153</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism: How Democracies Can Defeat the International Terrorist Network* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), xxi.

offers a wealth of material with which to evaluate the efficacy of international counter-terrorism policies.

Chapters I and III discuss in various ways how the British War Cabinet failed, in several points during the build up of the Second World War and in the war's early years, to separate Irish republican violence from the interests of the Free State. In response to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, Netanyahu and U.S. President George W. Bush offered a similar mistake. "We must make no distinction between the terrorists and the states that support them," writes Netanyahu.<sup>154</sup> This is fascinating because it illustrates the chastening perspective that Holly Case suggested might be found by looking at smaller states. It shows that very little has changed since the 1990s in terms of viewing terrorism or counter-insurgency. Powerful states troubled by small insurgent groups are likely to construct an enemy large enough to fight; such was certainly the case in the Second World War between the British and the Free State.

After the war, John Maffey made a statement about Eire. He talked about a meeting he had with de Valera earlier in the month. De Valera called the IRA's collusion with the Germans a "tragic difficulty" which plagued him and his Government by forcing them to take firm administrative action against men who were moved to violence and martyrdom by their strong resentment against Partition. Maffey summarized Eire's problem:

On the one side you have the simple practical administrative principle that no Government can tolerate direct interference with its own conduct of policy and must crush the rebel ruthlessly. On the other side you have crowds and marchings and bands and Requiem Masses...it seemed to me that patriotism in the case of many of these men is nothing more than a cloak to cover the gangster and the anarchist.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, xx.

<sup>155</sup> PRO CAB 129/10, "Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs," 25 May, 1946, 2.

During the war, de Valera instituted strict censorship that “had a powerful effect in keeping would-be martyrs in check.”<sup>156</sup> Once publicity was again available, Maffey feared there would be undoubtedly successors to the IRA. Indeed there were. By 1949, more than five armed and militant Irish republican organizations made their existence public and carried out operations against the British and Dublin governments.<sup>157</sup> Maffey blamed the war for the deterioration of negotiations over Partition, pointing out that Chamberlain had been “anxious to end Partition.” Maffey believed that those days had gone, though, and that “the blood sacrifice tradition in Ireland is strong.”<sup>158</sup> This insightful and melancholy observation demonstrates a feeling of the opportunity lost between Britain and Eire as a result of the war. The lost opportunity came from British reluctance to separate Irish republican violence from official state government. Granted, this a more difficult distinction to make when the official state governors were, as in the case of the Free State, proud former republican terrorists. However, the desire to see insurgents smashed brutally by the military might of a country is detrimental to solving the problem. It was in 1939, and it remains so today.

Irish author Richard English, in his 2009 book on terrorism, begins by saying, “we face two kinds of terrorist problem. One is practical, the other analytical, and our difficulties in responding to the former have been significantly exacerbated by our failings in regard to the latter.”<sup>159</sup> One of the difficulties of relating the IRA’s experiences in the Second World War to current counter-terrorist or counter-insurgency operations is

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Brian Hanley, *The IRA: A Documentary History 1916-2005* (Dublin: Gill & McMillan, 2010), 133.

<sup>158</sup> PRO CAB 129/10, 2.

<sup>159</sup> Richard English, *Terrorism: How to Respond* (Oxford University Press, 2009), ix.

the nearly overwhelming obstacle of semantics.<sup>160</sup> More than in any other historical field, the study of terrorism and insurgency suffers from an academy-wide unwillingness to define what a *terrorist* is, and when a *terrorist* may actually be an *insurgent* instead. If Sean Russell's IRA in 1939 were *terrorists*, then perhaps actions taken against them and lessons learned there may not be useful in Afghanistan's counterinsurgency. If, however, the IRA was an *insurgency*, then perhaps the Taliban government in Afghanistan is, in fact, a *terrorist* organization and demands a different approach. Scholars across the field speak directly past one another and, unfortunately, any attempt to step forward and offer a concrete definition of one or more of these terms would be met with such monumental criticism that nearly all historical writers preface their works with a discussion of the insubstantial nature of the word *terrorist* and *insurgent*. While such a preface may be, in fact, necessary, the result is a historical field dominated by circular conversation and which lacks a defining text. The IRA offers some help to this problem, as the organization has persisted for over a century and is the only potential terrorist organization with any such persistence. While there are scholars who claim that certain acts are *terrorist* and others which are *insurgent* in nature, any of them might find IRA actions to fit their paradigms, and the persistent nature of the IRA offers scholars the ability to see how and why actions may or may not have manifested as *terrorist* or *insurgent*.

What follows is a brief treatment of the development of COIN historiography. This treatment is not meant to be exhaustive and does not begin to cover the breadth or depth of the histories of Algeria, Vietnam, the American Civil War, Afghanistan, or Iraq.

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<sup>160</sup> This point here is not to engage in a discursive analysis of the word "terrorism," but rather to subvert that common argument by point out that regardless of where scholars might find themselves in that argument, the subject matter of this thesis can be usefully applied.



The connections made in this section are drawn specifically to link the IRA to the historiography of COIN, not to comment on the strengths or weaknesses of COIN theories as they've been applied in other conflicts.

The IRA's experience in the Second World War also offers a fundamentally useful set of evidence for counter-insurgency scholars. Like the field of terrorism history, counter-insurgency (COIN) histories offer a wide variety of definitions and prescriptions for future success and explanations for past failures. COIN histories effectively enter the academy in the 1950s and 60s with the publications of French officers serving during the Algerian insurgency, specifically David Galula and Roger Trinquier.<sup>161</sup> The important difference between these two seminal COIN writers is that Trinquier is noted for advocating making use of every weapon available to the enemy to destroy him.<sup>162</sup> Galula, by contrast, offers a less vehement set of steps to pursue victory against the insurgent, one that focuses on the capitalization of the non-concrete resources of a country, namely the hearts and minds of the population. The theories created by Galula and Trinquier, then, set the standard for the considerations of defeat and victory against the insurgent. For these writers, the hearts and minds and the enemy's will to continue violent resistance against official governments are the keys to effective COIN. This debate, that is, the debate over the usefulness of capturing hearts and minds and the means necessary to do so, has largely shaped the COIN historiography and is reflected

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<sup>161</sup> C.E. Calwell's *Small Wars* substantially predates Trinquier and Galula; however, Calwell's experiences with COIN in the Boer War are considered too outdated by the 1960s to be useful in COIN. Whether or not this is true is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>162</sup> Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1961), 1. Trinquier is keen to point out that the major power should make use of every weapon available to his enemy, rather than making use of every weapon available to himself. This point was a result of contention between himself and Galula during the Algerian insurgency over the use of helicopters and torture, the former of which Trinquier found unnecessary, as the Algerians did not have helicopters and the latter which he found useful, as the Algerians were also engaging in the torture of French soldiers.

similarly in the discussions of pacification and counter-insurgency in Vietnam. For example, Andrew Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam* claims that "the Army ignored the basic requirement of counterinsurgency: a secure population committed to the government."<sup>163</sup> Krepinevich's criticism of the Army's operations centers on its inability to deny the Viet Cong "[their] source of strength—access to the people."<sup>164</sup> This criticism is denied by other historians of pacification, such as Richard Hunt, who suggests that the Army's COIN strategy in Vietnam was pacification, and that that policy was effective specifically because it was able to take from the VC that organization's access to willing participants.<sup>165</sup>

The most recent development in the counterinsurgency debate, that is, the debate on whether or not the efficacy of COIN policy hinges on the deprivation of human resources to the enemy, has appeared in works by John Nagl and Mark Moyar. In *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* and *A Question of Command* respectively, Nagl and Moyar discuss the necessity of controlling the enemy's personnel through the manipulation of the hearts and minds, but each author adds another useful component to understanding the successes and failures of COIN. Nagl suggests that the capacity of the great power's military to learn and adapt is key to successful COIN. He compares the troubled experience of the U.S. Army in Vietnam with the relatively successful COIN operations of Great Britain in Malaya and makes a strong case. Moyar contributes to the discussion by stating, perhaps too strongly, that local commanders are crucial to effective COIN. To all of these questions, namely the issue of human resource deprivation, Army

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<sup>163</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 197.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> For more on pacification, see Richard Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998).

learning, and local command, the interwar battles against IRA violence and the wartime struggle for good intelligence offer insight.

For example, the local Garda reports of the Irish public turning blind eyes to IRA gunmen in the street shows how little effort was put into curbing IRA sympathy. While the Free State Government certainly engaged in censorship campaigns targeting *War News* and *An Poblacht*, these efforts were viewed as direct attacks against the IRA, rather than efforts to disincentivize IRA sympathy. The result was, like in Krepinevich's model, a population that lacked commitment to the government. This lack of commitment is further visible in the pitiful enlistment numbers for Eire's Local Defense Forces.

COIN in Eire, if it can be so called, is not a total failure, however, and sheds light on John Nagl's prescriptions on effective counterinsurgency. While, as this thesis demonstrated, Britain's perspectives on the IRA were largely misconstrued at the start of the war, as the war progressed, British intelligence simply got better. By the war's end, SIS and MI5 had effectively thrown in with the Dublin government and had adapted. Paul McMahon's *British Spies and Irish Rebels* details specific ways in which the British Intelligence Directorate "came to terms with Irish independence."<sup>166</sup> McMahon blames the Intelligence Directorate for the poor policy decisions made regarding neutral Eire in the war. However, as Nagl points out, militaries need time to adapt. Granted, they also need good intelligence to adapt, but it should be pointed out that many of the technologies and tactics for intelligence gathering in the 1930s were new, and most of them were being innovated in the field by British intelligence services. For example, as the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS) worked to crack German encryption

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<sup>166</sup> The title of Chapter 14 *British Spies and Irish Rebels* is "Coming to Terms with Irish Independence."

and monitor wireless traffic, what was being done about IRA saboteurs meeting in pubs with torn currency notes to identify one another? When British intelligence relied on the snitch as its prime mode of human intelligence gathering, what tactics were left when the IRA began assassinating snitches and perceived snitches with impunity?<sup>167</sup> The answer to each of these questions informs Mark Moyar's *A Question of Command*.

Moyar's book claims that the local commander, more than any other factor, is responsible for the success or failure of COIN operations. *A Question of Command* overstates this point, looking to the American Civil War and the its aftermath to describe how commanders that were in touch with the people around them were more effective in bringing those people to heel. He then observes a pattern between effective and ineffectual COIN commanders from the Civil War to the War in Iraq, dealing with the Philippine insurgency in between, to justify this claim. While these conflicts are too disparate to be helpful to such a claim, the claim itself is worthy of consideration. Are local commanders the lynchpin of effective COIN? The British intelligence chiefs certainly believed they were by the end of the Second World War. Whether the British surrender of IRA investigation to the Dublin government was an act of desperation or of canny COIN policy, the fact that IRA violence was effectively checked by Irishmen in Dublin, not the British from London, lends some interesting credence to Moyar's claims.

In conclusion, the experience of the IRA in the Second World War offers to future scholars a field worth further investigation. As Chapter I demonstrated, the IRA, or more correctly, militant Irish republicanism, was prolific and spreading throughout the Irish

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<sup>167</sup> This thesis does not specifically cover the implications of the assassination campaign, but from the 1916 rebellion to the Second World War, British Intelligence and the Garda marked a dramatic and steady decline in informants, as the IRA became culturally aware and violently opposed to the sharing of information. For more on the assassination campaign and its efficacy, see Geraghty, *The Irish War*.

diaspora. This is important because it offers scholars of nationalism, emigration, and identity a new source of material. Scholars like Paul Gilroy may be well served with a look at the international nature of Irish nationalism and its violent manifestations; particularly, for Gilroy, as the Irish struggles over race, state, and nation are against the same group of British people with whom his "Black Britons" struggle.<sup>168</sup>

Chapter II offered a look at the capacity of the interwar IRA and a sobering perspective on terrorist activity. This chapter, more than the others, demonstrates a fundamentally dangerous dimension of counter-terrorist, counterinsurgency operations; that is, the over-reaction that comes from pre-existing notions about people. Chapter II offers an important set of evidence to scholars like Prime Minister Netanyahu and his supporters, the most fundamental piece of which is the general disarray and ineffectiveness of many terrorist groups. Particularly in the wake of attacks, it is easy for policy makers to describe and believe that the perpetrators of bombings, hijackings, and murders represent a well-oiled machine that, without decisive and massive and unrelenting action, will never slow and cannot be stopped. At least with the IRA, that was not true. IRA violence continued after World War II, to be sure. Its escalation during the Troubles of the 1970s and 80s was particularly deadly. However, in large part due to the experiences and evolution of British intelligence during the Second World War, an Afghanistan-style invasion of Ireland has yet to occur,<sup>169</sup> despite IRA rhetoric to the contrary.

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<sup>168</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>169</sup> A note on sensitivity here. The "invasions" of Ireland by the British include a number of deadly, tragic engagements in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Any discussion of British invasions of Ireland would be incomplete without a look at the "Black and Tans," special operations soldiers sent to Ireland after the First World War. The Black and Tans are one of many sensitive subjects in the military history of Ireland and Britain, a history that goes back hundreds of years. This statement is intended merely to point out that while British policy makers have reacted and overreacted to Irish violence in the past, it has not been the policy of the

Chapter III described the actions taken by the Great Powers in World War II in response to IRA violence. These actions, taken in the context of the inability of the IRA to mobilize the kind of resources that British intelligence believed they could, can be seen as unnecessary. In this way, Chapter III supports McMahon's claims that had British intelligence been better in the Second World War, relations between the Free State and the U.K. would have improved.

There remains, however, a fairly limited amount of German language research on the motivations and thoughts of the Abwehr II commanders with regard to Irish republicans and their capacity to act as useful saboteurs. This thesis, like other treatments of the subject<sup>170</sup> relies heavily on the Public Records Office's KV2 file, commonly called "The Haller Report." SIS officials wrote this report from the interrogations of captive Abwehr II agents after the war and during the Nuremburg trials. Much of what appears in this document has been cross-referenced by SIS and the validity of the recollections of the Abwehr agents is verified where it can be, but regularly throughout the interrogations, SIS officers note that much of what is being said intentionally paints a picture of an incompetent agency poorly trained. This perspective thus dominates much of the existing scholarship on the relationship between Abwehr II and the IRA, and it is the position of this thesis that the Abwehr agents sent to Eire were, more or less, incompetent regarding various tasks. However, there is much research yet to be done regarding German intelligence in the war. For example, it should be point out that Colonel Edmund Vessenmayer, the first Abwehr chief given the task of dealing with the Free State, had a

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UK to overreact to IRA terrorism since the Second World War. The author is not insensitive to the Irish struggle against the UK, nor is he insensitive to the loss of life suffered by UK citizens at the hands of Irish radicals.

<sup>170</sup> Enno Stephan's *Spies in Ireland* and Mark Hull's *German Espionage in Ireland*, specifically, but also McMahon's *British Spies and Irish Rebels* and Eunan O'Halpin's *Spying on Ireland*.

massively successful career as an instigator of insurgent violence in Czechoslovakia and Romania early in the war.<sup>171</sup> His strategy in accomplishing the destabilization of those regions, thus preparing them for German invasion, was through the covert support of local radical nationalists. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the IRA seemed an ideal point of contact for Abwehr II. Further, Vessenmayer's success on the continent begs questions about the likelihood that German spies were, in fact, not proficient at sowing the seeds of revolution in foreign lands. That they failed in Ireland may not be, as much of the current scholarship claims, a function of German incompetence but may be, as this thesis suggests, a result of good strategy placed over poor tactical potential. The IRA simply was not what Germany thought it was.

As a whole, this thesis has argued that the IRA appeared to be a spreading terrorist power in the late 1930s. Its connections in the U.S., Germany, and the USSR specifically made the organization a priority for SIS threat assessment and its willingness to conduct violent operations in the UK made it a viable target for Abwehr sabotage. Such was not the case, however; the IRAs connections worldwide were superficial at best, and its capacity to conduct operations in the UK was overblown. The result was a strategic problem for the Allies, a tactical problem for the Axis, and a political problem for the Free State. These problems, when considered together, provide insight into the importance of terrorist organizations and small state nationalism to military history.

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<sup>171</sup> Edmund Vessenmayer was given credit for the Abwehr's successes in instigating USTASHA violence in Croatia as well as the defection of General Kvaternik, which led to the declaration of Croatian independence from Yugoslavia after the Germans invaded that country (Yugoslavia). PRO KV2/762, "German Intelligence Officers."

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