

A 'War on Terror' in Northern Ireland?
Northern Irish Perceptions of the War against Terrorism
and the War in Iraq

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At a joint summit meeting between the United States and the European Union held in Ireland during the summer of 2004, United States President George W. Bush used the occasion to describe the Northern Irish peace process as a model that other troubled societies could imitate.¹ After his annotation on Northern Ireland, however, the president committed the rest of his remarks to addressing stark divisions over the war in Iraq, while across Ireland protestors took part in mass demonstrations against the war.² Perhaps those present at the castle noticed the distinct antilogy prevailing between the two issues on the president's agenda that day –the expressed hope of better days in Northern Ireland, followed by the sober maintenance of a global war against terrorism concentrated in the Middle East. Yet Bush's visit also occasions a different type of question altogether: In Northern Ireland, itself no stranger to terrorism, how has the 'War on Terror' influenced the conflict between catholic nationalists and protestant unionists, as well as the ongoing peace process between them that has seen Irish republicanism incorporated into mainstream politics?

This paper assesses how the war against terrorism has affected Northern Ireland. I first examine its impact on the peace process, and on republican and unionist perceptions. I then discuss how war in Iraq has influenced nationalists and unionists, and consider how the politics of Northern Ireland have thus been affected. Whereas the 'War on Terror' is perceived to have initially had broad implications on the peace process, the unpopularity of the Iraq war has perhaps depressed

¹Among his comments, Bush said that 'when this conflict is resolved, it will be an example for others – that long-simmering disputes can be put behind them and free societies and peaceful societies can emerge for the interests of the peoples which have been involved in those disputes.' See 'Bush Claims Irish Peace Plan a Model for Others', *Irish News* 28 June 2004, p. 7. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

² See Angelique Chrisafis, 'Stepping out to a Cold Irish Welcome', *Guardian/UK*, 26 June 2004 <<http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/headlines04/0626-01.htm>> (22 April 2007); 'George Bush Arrives at Dromland Castle', *RTE News*, 25 June 2004 <<http://www.rte.ie/news/2004/0625/bush.html>> (22 April 2007).

viewpoints of the overall war against terrorism, to the point that its applicability to the conflict in Northern Ireland has eroded.

Background: Getting Acquainted with the War on Terror

Besides broadly transforming the terrain of international relations, the war against terrorism's inception also provided a new conceptual framework into which conflicted societies would have to insert themselves. It is in this hue that I discuss Northern Ireland. In the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks in America, unionist leaders claimed that Irish republicanism was ideologically and thematically pertinent to the terrorism phenomenon striking on September 11th.³ Yet nationalists also acknowledged a change in climate; for instance, the moderate-nationalist newspaper *Irish News* opined that 'in moral terms, attacks on Canary Wharf (struck by the provisional IRA) and the World Trade Centre differ only in terms of scale,'⁴ a phrase picked up on and oft-repeated by unionist politicians in the coming days.⁵ Irish republicanism was under threat. In the United States, itself a significant bastion of republican support, the national mood prevailing after September 11th could hardly prove favourable, for 'the most obvious change, unintentionally engineered by the 11

³ UUP leader David Trimble declared that 'no moral distinction' existed between the attacks on America and the 1998 IRA bombing of Omagh, while Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Ian Paisley accused republicans of being part of international terrorism and, in claiming that concessions to terrorists had encouraged terrorism, suggested that cooperation with republican paramilitaries during the peace process had encouraged the use of terrorism elsewhere. See David Trimble, 'Lack of Response to Financial Appeal Angers Sir Bob.' *Belfast Telegraph* 21 February 2002. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007); William Graham, 'Feelings Run Close to Surface at Emergency Assembly Debate.' *Irish News* 14 September 2001, p. 7. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

⁴ 'A Different Mood Will Face Those Who Favour Violence; Terror in the Skies.' *Irish News* 13 September 2001, p. 16. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

⁵ Acting First Minister Sir Reg Empey cited the editorial's line in addressing an emergency assembly debate called to condemn the attacks, while UK Unionist Party leader Robert McCartney said no difference existed between attacks on the Canary Wharf and the World Trade Center. See Graham 2001.

September terrorists for Northern Ireland, involved a new US sense of urgency and alarm regarding terrorism, even in its non-Islamic guise.’⁶

Likewise, the events of September 11th were neither encouraging for the prospects of Sinn Fein, the reputed political wing of the provisional IRA. The dramatic shift of perspective caused by the terrorist attacks threatened its US fundraising base, perhaps more gravely than unionist accusations could ever pierce. The PIRA’s involvement in the ‘Columbia Three’ episode⁷, coupled with Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams’ visit with ‘longstanding ally’ Fidel Castro in Cuba⁸, also took its toll on Irish American and US congressional support. Above all, the Bush administration was keen to send the message that terrorism would not be tolerated in any form, but was instead a ‘seamless robe’⁹ pertaining to terrorist organizations in places even as remote as Northern Ireland. When the US banned the republican paramilitary group Continuity IRA (along with dissident loyalist groups Orange Volunteers and Red Hand Defenders) shortly after September 11th, adding it to a list that included multiple al-Qaeda fronts as well as groups linked to Hamas, it appeared that the newly launched ‘War on Terror’ might indeed immediately impact the shores of Northern Ireland.¹⁰ Even amidst an ongoing peace process, republicans could not be certain how far the newly chartered ‘Bush Doctrine’ would stretch.

In sum, the republican-friendly days of the Clinton administration – pronounced more sophisticatedly as the post Cold War/pre September 11 period – had ended, replaced by a war against terrorism which could hardly have seemed

⁶ John Drumbell, ‘The New American Connection: President George W. Bush and Northern Ireland’, in Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen (eds.) *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement* 2nd Edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 362.

⁷ See Drumbell, pp. 361-4.

⁸ ‘Adams Takes Soft Line to Keep Friends in New York.’ *Belfast Telegraph* 2 November 2001. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

⁹ Drumbell, p. 363.

¹⁰ ‘US Clamps Down on Dissident Terrorists’, *Belfast Telegraph* 7 December 2001, *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007); Hugh Dougherty, ‘Powell Puts Squeeze on Dissident Breakaway Groups’, *Irish News* 8 December 2001, p. 9. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

favourable to republicans, and which was 'quite obviously not the ideal backdrop for the conduct of a peace process.'¹¹ Battling potential isolation, Sinn Fein scrambled to maintain its fundraising base in the US, and deter any attempt the Bush administration might consider to deliberately target Irish republicanism as a facet of the broader war against terrorism. They sought to portray republicanism in an alternative light, wholly unrecognizable with that of Islamist terrorist groups and tactics; thus, its public language on decommissioning,¹² the 'Columbia Three' incident,¹³ and the issue of terrorism in general changed almost immediately. Yet it was realized that tangible progress in the peace process would also be required on their behalf, and the first acts of weapons decommissioning by the provisional IRA were thus delivered.¹⁴ In announcing its decision, the IRA claimed that it had taken the decision in order to save the peace process 'and to persuade others of our intentions.'¹⁵ Whether those 'others' of which they spoke might have referred to members of the international community, it was not specified, but it hardly seemed a coincidence that acts of weapons decommissioning occurred a month after September 11th.¹⁶ Yet as these efforts carried on through year's end of 2002, it remained difficult to assess whether republicanism had been permanently reconsidered, and neither unionists nor republicans could declare their efforts triumphant.

¹¹ Adrian Guelke, 'Political Comparisons: From Johannesburg to Jerusalem', in Cox, Guelke and Stephen (2006): 375.

¹² Drumbell, p. 362.

¹³ For example, the Washington-based and Sinn Fein-allied group 'Irish National Caucus' criticized US Congressional hearings on the alleged IRA links with Colombian Rebels as being a 'total disaster' for 'enemies of the peace process', and that the lack of evidence demonstrated in the hearings had 'vindicated' Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams. See Maeve Connolly, 'Columbia Hearing 'a Dangerous Agenda.' *Irish News* 26 April 2002. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

¹⁴ Adrian Guelke 'The International System and the Peace Process', *IBIS Working Paper No. 21* (2002)pp. 6-8.

¹⁵ Drumbell, p. 362.

¹⁶ For further discussion of the provisional IRA's 2001 decision to decommission some of its weapons after September 11th, see Drumbell 2006, pp. 362-4; Guelke 2002, pp. 6-8.

Perceptions of Republicanism, Unionist Frustrations, and the War on Terror

2003 would prove revealing. In assembly elections that November, Sinn Fein achieved its greatest electoral success since the party had begun contesting elections, winning 23 percent of the general vote and replacing the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP) as the largest catholic/nationalist party.¹⁷ I must emphasize that the election resulted from many internal affairs in Northern Ireland unrelated to my arguments. Yet, the remarkable shift in nationalist representation – Sinn Fein gained six seats while the SDLP lost five – also demonstrates that, at least among nationalist voters, the ‘political party of republicans’ had not only proven its legitimacy within a post-September 11th climate, but that it had significantly strengthened its hand. Perceptions of republican politics and violence remain varied, but it is evident from the election that in the eyes of many participants, when comparing the IRA and Al-Qaeda, or republicanism and Islamic extremism, one could be distinguished from the other.

Some academics have echoed this distinction. In his own discussion on the impact that international events have had on Northern Ireland (albeit focusing on the climate of the Cold war rather than the war on terror), Michael Cox warns against equating Irish republicanism with other movements:

Ruthless though old forms of terrorism may have been, their instigations were still compelled to operate in a world not of their own, otherworldly, fantasies composed of infidels and paradise, but one shaped by the logic of a larger ideological conflict that in the main involved rational actors, rational ends and the possibility of negotiated settlements.¹⁸

¹⁷ Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN), *Assembly Election (NI): Wednesday 26 November 2003*, 4 January 2007, <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/ra2003.htm>> (30 March, 2007).

¹⁸ Michael Cox, ‘Rethinking the International: a Defence’ in Cox, Guelke and Stephen (2006) p. 439.

Rationality is what led Irish republicans to review options and engage in the peace process during the 1990s, Cox argues, and also what separates it from 'new forms of terrorism associated with Islam and what one writer has termed the "Occidental" hatred of all things Western.'¹⁹ A case is made that, particularly from the vantage point of American opinion, the war against terrorism would always tilt toward that manifested in Islamic extremism.

Indeed, while banning the Real and Continuity IRA, the US government never unambiguously identified Irish republicanism as a form of terrorism with which to reckon (instead, the Bush administration has aligned itself closely with British policy, as will be discussed shortly). Likewise, American sentiment was not irredeemably harmed: even in arguing that republican fundraising in America would be impaired for some years to come, John Drumbell nevertheless notes that '11 September damaged rather than extinguished the traditional reservoir of pro-IRA sentiment among some Irish-Americans.'²⁰ As evidenced by the 2003 and later the 2007 assembly elections²¹, it seems that nationalists too have drawn a line between Irish republicanism and the war against terrorism. As long as support of this kind endured, mainstream republican groups, particularly Sinn Fein, could rest easier in the comfort of such distinctions.²²

However, the 2003 election also marked the advent as the largest political party in Northern Ireland of the harder-line unionist Democratic Unionist Party

¹⁹ Cox, p. 439.

²⁰ Drumbell, p. 363.

²¹ Sinn Fein increased its number of seats from 24 to 28, and its percent of the overall vote from 24 to 26 percent. See Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN), *Assembly Election (NI) Wednesday 7 March 2007*, 9 March 2007, <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/2007nia/ra2007.htm>> (22 April 2007)

²² This viewpoint overlooks the provisional IRA's 2005 decision to permanently disarm, and whether the decision was undertaken as a result of new pressures brought on by the war against terrorism, or moreso by political calculations internal to the peace process. Without possessing the necessary space allotment to discuss that decision at length, I readily admit that this may present a point of contention toward my claim.

(DUP), which refused to speak much less govern with Sinn Fein. While I again stress the importance of domestic matters, the DUP's ascendance is better understood when viewed in the context of outside events as well. Following the terrorist attacks in America, unionists resented advances made by republicans during the peace process, including the provisional IRA's avoidance of unequivocal condemnation from the international community.²³ They were disappointed by the United States, which had exhibited no inclination to identify the IRA as the type of group on which the war against terrorism could potentially focus. But it was the actions, perhaps 'inaction' from a unionist perspective, of the British government that added salt to the wound: that London was either unable or unwilling to incorporate the republican movement as a broader component of the war against terrorism frustrated them most of all. A political cartoon, cited by Guelke,²⁴ epitomizes the nature of their agitation. Two bearded fighters appear in a cave, and one says to another, 'Hang on and they'll give you an office in Westminster'.

A more sober example transpired in 2004, after it emerged that the British government had not asked the US state department to add *all* republican (and loyalist) groups onto its designated 'foreign terrorists' list,²⁵ nor had it asked Washington to monitor and investigate Sinn Fein members visiting the US as allowed by the counter-terrorism 'Patriot Act' legislation.²⁶ Learning this, Ulster Unionist MP David Burnside accused the British government of double standards.

²³ See for example Lindy McDowell's column in the *Belfast Telegraph* on 28 February 2003, where she wrote how 'sick' she was of 'being lectured (to) by terrorists, former terrorists and "activists"', and wrote facetiously 'as I've said before, my view is that just because I've never killed anyone doesn't mean I'm a bad person': Lindy McDowell, 'More than Tricky Dicky in "on-the-run" Drama,' *Belfast Telegraph* 28 February 2003. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

²⁴ Guelke 2002.

²⁵ By that time the list included the Real IRA, Continuity IRA, Orange Volunteers and Red Hand Defenders.

²⁶ According to the following cited article, the US Patriot Act 'enables the FBI and other agencies to tap phones, access private medical and library records and track internet usage of people suspected of involvement in terrorism and to detain immigrants.' See 'UK "Using Double Standards" in Its International War on Terror', *Irish News* 31 July 2004. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

‘Why is the United Kingdom and the United States involved in a so-called international campaign against terrorism when the campaign at home against republican and so-called loyalist terrorists is one of do-nothing and appeasement?’ Burnside demanded.²⁷

In a press conference the following year, British Prime Minister Tony Blair inadvertently provided an answer – and ignited a brief storm of protest from unionists. Blair stated publicly that the provisional IRA’s political demands or their previous atrocities could not be directly compared to al-Qaeda fundamentalists who carried out the attacks of 11 September.²⁸ Unionists angrily accused Blair of hypocrisy: Ulster Unionist leader Sir Reg Empey denounced the comments as ‘creating double standards between terrorists’, while Democratic Unionist MP Sammy Wilson said that ‘whether a terrorist sets out to murder one person or 100 people, they are a terrorist and no difference should be drawn.’²⁹

The fury over the prime minister’s comments eventually subsided. In fact, portrayals of the IRA, as a relevant brand of terrorism to be specifically targeted and stomped out by the war on terror, have in general never gained much traction with the Blair government. Any benefits that could be expected by taking a much bolder position on the IRA post-September 11th have been far outweighed by the positive attention and perceived successes of the peace process. As noted by Guelke:

It is obviously going to take a lot more than barbed comments in newspapers (or, for that matter, the complaints of unionists) to bring about a fundamental change in the British government’s policy towards Northern Ireland. The government has every political interest in maintaining a rosy view of what the Belfast agreement [the 1998 peace accord] has achieved and to play down the difficulties.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Blair’s exact words were, ‘‘I don’t think you can compare the political demands of republicanism with the political demands of this terrorist ideology we’re facing now... I don’t think the IRA would ever have set about trying to kill 3,000 people.’ William Graham, ‘Attacks on London – ‘‘No Double Standards on Terrorism’’, *Irish News* 27 July 2005. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

²⁹ Graham, 27 July 2005.

Internationally, the Belfast agreement still tends to be seen as a valuable model for the settlement of seemingly intractable ethnic conflicts.³⁰

The Bush administration was neither persuaded that the time had come to engage the PIRA, and the Republic of Ireland was certainly not prepared to pursue republicans so aggressively; instead, both governments continued cooperation with London – thus wrenching the thorn deeper into the sides of unionists.³¹ If the battle had been to turn the perceptions of relevant global actors (i.e. The United States, United Kingdom and less so the Republic of Ireland) against the republican movement, or at least convince other governments to take a considerably harder line on republicanism in general, unionism had apparently failed.

But while uncompromising attitudes toward republicanism were unpersuasive abroad, they proved popular at home with voters disgruntled by republican advances made since the 1998 Belfast Agreement. This represented no small chunk: Guelke notes that, ‘within Northern Ireland, much of the optimism with which liberal opinion greeted the achievement of the accord has dissipated.’³² For hard-line unionists, the war against terrorism may have also breathed new life into old claims. Anti-agreement unionists had at the outset denounced the Belfast Agreement as constituting nothing less than appeasement to terrorists. Their views, once seeming outdated as a number of regional conflicts were settled in the aftermath of the Cold War, ‘acquired a new lease of life’ after September 11th.³³

It was thus the case in late 2003 that while Sinn Fein had recovered from post-September 11th threats the DUP had capitalized on the resultant unionist frustrations.

³⁰ Guelke 2002, p. 10.

³¹ The thorn was particularly sharp in the case of America because of Washington’s willingness to craft its policy on Northern Ireland around the wishes of its main ally in the war against terrorism, Tony Blair. See Drumbell, p. 363-4.

³² Ibid. Among the reasons cited are electoral polarization; intensification of segregation; the continuation of lethal political violence, (lower levels than before the ceasefires); increases in “punishment beatings” by paramilitary organizations; and ongoing inter-communal conflict in areas (such as North Belfast).

³³ Guelke 2006, p. 371.

However, 2003 was also the year that all the parties – as well as the people of Northern Ireland and indeed the rest of the world – would witness the war against terrorism’s broadest and most controversial front: the American-led invasion of Iraq.

Northern Ireland and the War in Iraq

Suggesting that the Iraq war, launched in March 2003 and raging to this day, proved controversial amongst the people of Northern Ireland hardly offers much in the way of revelation. Yet it is of interest that those who lived through the Northern Irish conflict could empathize with events of the war. Some associations made, such as noting the use of military tactics in the war first developed in Northern Ireland, were more mundane;³⁴ others foresaw the entire global campaign to extinguish terrorism – now fought on the central stage of Iraq – through a lens framed by the Northern Irish troubles.³⁵ And although the forthcoming analysis is somewhat speculative, it is of even greater significance that the unpopularity of the war may have sufficiently tainted the Northern Irish’s taste of the broader war against terrorism, and curbed efforts to portray the Northern Irish conflict as part of it.

Many people in Northern Ireland opposed the war.³⁶ But in doing so, many drew from the experiences of ‘the troubles’ to justify their opposition. Particularly amongst nationalists, many of the war’s more discouraging revelations –

³⁴ For instance, *Irish News* writer Ray O’Hanlon noted that street patrol techniques used by US marines in Baghdad and Fallujah had been applied by the British army in Northern Ireland. See Ray O’Hanlon, ‘Iraq War Becoming a Hard Pill to Swallow’, *Irish News* 20 April 2004. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

³⁵ For instance, in an editorial lambasting the difficulties of building consensus on Iraq amongst western countries, the *Belfast Telegraph* wrote that a war against terrorism, ‘as we in Northern Ireland know only too well’, was proving to be a nightmare for all western governments. See ‘World Fearful as Iraq Tension Grows: Efforts to Build a United Consensus Over Iraq Strategy Must Continue’, *Belfast Telegraph* 12 February 2003. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

³⁶ While polling data was not found for Northern Ireland, a 2003 United Kingdom poll found 52 percent of UK citizens opposed military intervention in Iraq without authorization from the United Nations. See The Special Broadcasting System, *The World Guide: United Kingdom Recent History*, 2004, <<http://sbs.com.au/theworldnews/Worldguide/index.php3?country=208&header=5>> (22 April 2007).

controversies such as detainment methods and allegations of torture – seemed eerily familiar. In late 2003 *Irish News* columnist Breidge Gadd questioned the prime minister’s approach to the war against terrorism in general, and the war in Iraq in particular, given the hypothetical advice available from senior army personnel who served in Northern Ireland. ‘Surely they would have cautioned him that given their experience here you can never defeat an organized, determined, highly trained group of people intent on fighting against you, using not the arena of open warfare but rather car bombs, snipers and surprise attacks,’ Gadd wrote,³⁷ while in 2006 fellow *Irish News* writer Ray O’Hanlon said that the recently-passed American ‘Detainee Bill’ was doubtlessly reminiscent of Troubles-era legislation such as the Emergency Powers Act, Diplock Courts and so forth.³⁸ Along with these commentators and the *Irish News*, Sinn Fein and the SDLP opposed the war and criticized its management as conducted by the Bush administration.³⁹ Gerry Adams harkened language that was familiarly anti-imperialist but nominally directed at Britain, noting Sinn Fein’s ‘serious problems’ with the direction of US foreign policy, and called on America to end the ‘occupation of Iraq’ and return sovereignty to Iraqis (Adams nevertheless congratulated the president’s recent re-election and passed on his best wishes).⁴⁰

As far as nationalist and republican thinking went, Adams’ comment in particular underscores the development in the campaign against terrorism of a significant caveat brought on by the war. Iraq shattered what had been amongst western states a united effort to eradicate global terrorism. In its stead, the intentions

³⁷ Breidge Gadd, ‘A Tête-à-tête with Tony on Terrorism,’ *Irish News* 25 November 2003, p. 2. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

³⁸ Ray O’Hanlon, ‘Bush Takes Issue with US’s Intelligent Minds,’ *Irish News* 4 October 2006, p. 10. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

³⁹ After the president was re-elected in 2004, SDLP leader Mark Durkan publicly commented that ‘I cannot pretend that I wouldn’t have preferred a different result’. See William Graham, ‘Reaction in the North’ *Irish News* 4 November 2004, p. 15. *Lexis Nexus Professional* (8 March 2007).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

of the United States were scrutinized seriously. This of course had monstrous implications for international perceptions of the US-led war against terrorism overall; whereas before, its mission and morality had been considered nearly inviolable, western states and citizens now viewed it more contentiously and with greater suspicion. This was the case in Northern Ireland. For republicans, who to that point had been forced to unbendingly defend themselves as anything other than that which the war against terrorism targeted, Iraq offered a far easier defence of calling attention to the war itself. This is not to suggest that Sinn Fein brazenly condemned American efforts in Iraq at every opportunity, so as to indirectly relieve pressure on republicanism - relations with America were far too important to be so reckless. But just as Iraq cast a negative pall on the war against terrorism, other efforts declared in the name of the 'War on Terror' were greeted by a more sceptical audience.

It thus appears fair to describe as unambiguous nationalists' opposition to the war. Unionist attitudes proved much more difficult to gauge. This is not to say that unionism found itself on uncertain ideological footing between pro and anti-war camps: inasmuch as they discussed the issue, unionists generally approved of the war in Iraq, at least at its outset.⁴¹ However, their enthusiasm might be better described as 'tepid' rather than fervent, particularly after it grew apparent that American and British forces had become 'mired' in Iraq. Unionist leaders were not so zealous as to commit a bold showing of support to a military campaign with no known end, lacking support and viewed suspiciously by a great many voters, and in any case possessing no direct bearing on Northern Ireland. They were equally hesitant to link

⁴¹ Inasmuch as local reaction to Bush's 2004 re-election constituted a barometer for support of the war against terrorism post-Iraq, unionist leaders tested quite positively; both DUP and UUP leaders Paisley and Trimble warmly praised a Bush second term, welcoming his re-election and 'his fight against terrorism.' See Malachi O'Doherty, 'Red Faces All Around as Blair Brings an Unwelcome Guest', *Belfast Telegraph* 7 April 2003.

it to the Northern Irish conflict in the same manner Islamic and republican terrorism had been bridged two years earlier. Doubtlessly, one reason for the absence of comparison was the nature of the confrontation as it was waged as a standoff between two states, the United States government and the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. But does it seem so unlikely that, had there been recognized some prospect of benefit, unionists would have rationalized and connected events in Iraq to that of Northern Ireland, particularly as the war's essentiality shifted from regime change to counter-insurgency?

Admittedly, further research is required before asserting that Iraq had such a sweeping effect on unionism; still, I shall suggest, if not avow, that it disrupted unionists' desired portrayals of republicanism post-September 11th. Publicly comparing the unpopular war to conflict in Northern Ireland would have been unwise; to name a few possible repercussions, it may have invoked sympathetic associations similar to those enjoyed between republicans and the Palestinians or black South Africans, or rekindled anti-imperialist rhetoric toward unionists and Britain. Thus, whereas unionists repeatedly compared the IRA to Al Qaeda in the days and weeks following September 11th, few if any public associations between the IRA and Iraqi insurgents were forthcoming. While the overall war against terrorism had held promise for pressuring Irish republicanism and the IRA, it was recognized that a large-scale war in Iraq offered little.

Conclusion

What does all this reveal? Besides realizing the Northern Irish's unique ability to relate to the war, one begins to at least conjecture that in the eyes of the Northern Irish, including unionists, Iraq contaminated perceptions of the campaign against terrorism, and diluted attempts to incorporate Irish republicanism within its

scope. That Iraq occurred the same year as Sinn Fein's electoral successes, acted as a double punch against further attempts to portray republicanism as illegitimate. From 2003 to 2006 the more obdurate unionists would certainly continue when describing Irish republicanism to paint a portrait of terrorism. However, one considers that from the vantage point of unionists, and certainly from nationalists, the perceived efficiency of connecting the war against terrorism immediately to Northern Ireland began to fade when the bombs started to fall on Baghdad.

This paper has described how the war against terrorism launched after the terrorist attacks in America has affected events and perceptions in Northern Ireland. The immediate impact of September 11th caused republican groups like Sinn Fein and the provisional IRA to adjust to a less sympathetic international climate. However, attempts to perceptually link them with other guises of terrorism, while rousing the unionist base, did not persuade either the British or American governments to adopt a significantly different approach to the peace process regarding republican mainstream groups, nor did the war against terrorism result in the universal condemnation of Irish republicanism first thought possible given the commencement of a 'War on Terror'. Its applicability to Northern Ireland was then further eroded by the Iraq war. Not only has this had implications for Northern Irish attitudes, which I have attempted to describe, but it also calls attention to the relevance of the 'War on Terror' to all ethnic conflicts familiar to the terrorism phenomenon but extraneous to larger geopolitical considerations.

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