The Northern Ireland Information Service and the media

Aims, strategy, tactics

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Media images of Northern Ireland have been the subject of critical analysis by researchers since the early years of the current period of 'troubles'. Many have argued that the media concentrate on violence at the expense of background or contextual information (Curtis 1984; Elliot 1977; Schlesinger 1987; Schlesinger, Murdock and Elliot 1983). The continuing flow of decontextualized and seemingly irrational violent incidents are assumed by many critics to 'fit' unproblematically with the psychological warfare strategies of the state and thus to allow official sources to dominate the news. Schlesinger has argued that one-dimensional coverage of this type 'reflects, at least in part, the effective long-term strategy of attrition waged by the British state in its psychological-warfare campaign, one which has involved increasingly sophisticated public relations techniques' (1981: 92). However, these 'sophisticated' public relations techniques have, in fact, come in for very little study. Additionally most critical analysis has itself concentrated on how violence is reported with a consequent neglect of the role of other images of Northern Ireland. One reason for this focus on the coverage of violence by media critics is clear. National television and press reporting *is* dominated by violence or conflict-related incidents (Elliot 1977). A further reason is the 'media-centric' (Schlesinger 1990) approach of many studies which concentrate on the production of news or on news content, with a consequent neglect of the perspectives and media strategies of powerful (and less-powerful) source organizations. Once we begin to investigate them it becomes clear that it is indeed only 'in part' that the coverage of violence reflects the long-term strategy of the British state. For example, the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) itself has criticized media portrayals of Northern Ireland in terms which are similar to some academic critiques: 'Most people, dependent on the media for their information, see Northern Ireland as a community in turmoil – wracked by violence, bitterly divided, socially regressive. That perception is wrong' (NIO 1989: 72). Apparently, then, the NIO itself is not *always* keen on the type of reporting which is current in British news coverage of Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Information Service (NIIS) is the press and public

relations division of the NIO, the British government department responsible for running Northern Ireland. The Information Service is a major source of political news on Northern Ireland. It delivers press releases to news desks in Belfast three times a day and in 1991–2 employed fifty-eight staff in its Belfast and London offices (*Hansard*, 7 May 1991: 429 (w)). In 1989–90 it spent £7.238 million on press and PR, administering a population of 1.5 million (*Hansard*, 2 April 1990: 451–2 (w)). In the same year, by comparison, the Scottish Office, which administers 5 million people, spent £1.4 million (*Hansard*, 30 April 1991: 158–9 (w)).

This chapter will examine NIO public relations aims, strategy and tactics.[1] First, after a short introduction to interpretations of the conflict in Ireland, I will look at the broad strategy of the Information Service. Using the example of a publicity booklet issued in 1989 I will illustrate the general picture of the conflict the NIO attempts to paint. Second, I will examine some key themes which have been emphasized by the NIO and demonstrate how they are targeted. Third, I want to look at the different tactics the NIO uses in its relations with different sets of journalists. A key problem for much contemporary media research is the assumption that the media are homogeneous. In this view the process of news negotiation is similar regardless of the type of news outlet or source organization(s) involved (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1989: 24). But as Ericson, Baranek and Chan note, different sources have different requirements of publicity and secrecy. I will suggest that it is also the case that the NIO operates a 'hierarchy of access' in relation to different groups of journalists in order to influence various audience agendas.[2]

LEGITIMACY AND THE STATE

The central dispute in interpretations of the conflict in Ireland is the question of the legitimacy of the Northern Ireland state and of the British presence. The official view of the conflict is based on an assumption, rarely made explicit, that the state is legitimate. While it acknowledges that the civil rights protests in the late 1960s against the systematic discrimination, gerrymandering and repression of the Unionist government had some justification, it sees the introduction of Direct Rule in 1972 as having fundamentally reformed the Northern Ireland state. From that point on, the causes of the conflict had been removed and any manifestations of unrest could only be explained as initiating from 'extremists'. This view denies the political motivation of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) who are seen simply as terrorists. The IRA is held to be a criminal conspiracy which is similar to organized crime networks such as the Mafia (thus the use of the term 'godfathers' in some official propaganda). It is also presented to some audiences as part of an international network of 'terrorists' with connections to Marxist revolutionaries in Europe, anti-western feeling

in the Middle East, particularly Libya, and was until recently linked to the global ambitions of the Soviet Union.

The role of the British army and Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in all this is seen as being to counter the 'terrorist threat' and keep the peace between the warring factions. The governmental apparatus exists solely to oversee a return of 'normality'. Thus we have seen media coverage of a large number of attempts by the British to 'facilitate' a negotiated settlement between the two communities. When these fail the responsibility rests, in the official version, solely with the deep and irreconcilable historical antagonisms which bind the unionist and nationalist communities in conflict.

But there are other views of the conflict. The most widely held of these stresses that Britain is not 'above' the conflict but is actually an intimate part of it. In this view the question of the legitimacy of the state is central. The conflict in Ireland is seen as rooted in the creation of the statelet of Northern Ireland in 1921 specifically to ensure a protestant majority in perpetuity. The cause of the conflict in Ireland is therefore seen as the existence of the border. In this view the maintenance of the border is guaranteed by both the presence of British troops and the funding of the current administrative set-up by the British government. The cost of this British subvention to Northern Ireland in 1988–9 was £1.9 billion (Gaffikin and Morrissey 1990: 49). Versions of this view are shared by many politicians in the south of Ireland, the Social, Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) in the north as well as by some politicians in Britain. It is also current in some parts of the media. The *Daily Mirror*, for example, has put this view since 1978. In an editorial, signed by former proprietor Robert Maxwell, following the collapse in the summer of 1991 of the latest round of talks sponsored by the NIO, the *Mirror* repeated its view that the conflict continues because it is funded and underwritten by Britain:

> Once again, a well-meaning attempt by the British government to solve the unsolvable in Ulster has ended in failure. It will always be so. The Northern Ireland Secretary, Peter Brooke, as so many decent men before him, tried to win from the leaders of the Protestant majority and the Catholic minority an agreement on some measure of power sharing. *He was doomed to failure, as were all the other Government Ministers who have tried before him.* The Protestant Unionist leadership will never concede an inch to the Catholic republicans as long as they believe they have a Big Brother in Britain to protect and finance them. The nationalists will remain obstinate while they believe the Dublin Government is always in their corner.
>
> (*Daily Mirror*, 5 July 1991; emphasis in original)

Arguments like these recognize that the conflict in Ireland is essentially a political one for which there is no military solution. Contrary to the logic of

much *public* official thinking some senior figures in the British establishment also accept that this is the case. General Sir James Glover, the former Commander-in-Chief, UK Land Forces, who had previously served as an intelligence officer in Northern Ireland, has put this view:

> In no way can, or will, the Provisional IRA ever be defeated militarily . . . . The long war will last as long as the Provisional IRA have the stamina, the political motivation – I used to call it the sinews of war – but, the wherewithal to sustain their campaign and so long as there is a divided island of Ireland.
>
> (*Panorama*, BBC 1, 29 February 1988)

Some unionists in Northern Ireland also question the idea that Britain is neutral in the conflict. Many are distrustful of the motivations of British policy and often suspect their interests are being ignored or that they will be 'sold out' to the south. This was one of the main loyalist objections to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. As a result of such uneasy feelings, some unionists now advocate either an independent Northern Ireland or closer integration with Britain in order to lessen the chances of being 'cut loose'.

The NIIS has sought to present its view of the conflict as the legitimate and rational perspective in opposition to that of the paramilitaries and other 'extremists'. Yet it is clear that both nationalists and some unionists in Ireland as well as some powerful voices in the media and, indeed, the British military do not altogether share their perspective. Instead they see the presence or role of the British as part of the problem.

'THE WICKEDNESS OF TERRORISM' VS 'A COMMUNITY ON THE MOVE': THE STRATEGY OF THE NIO

The central strategy of successive British governments in Northern Ireland has been one of containment. Home Secretary Reginald Maudling provided an early illustration of this when he memorably revealed that the aim of the British government was to reduce the violence to 'an acceptable level' (*Sunday Times* Insight Team 1972: 309). But as O'Dowd, Rolston and Tomlinson have pointed out the strategy of containment is not simply one of repression or counter-insurgency. When the British introduced Direct Rule to Northern Ireland in 1972 they followed a dual strategy in which they 'Accelerated the drive for reforms and the reconstitution of the rule of law, while at the same time drawing upon the latest repertoire of counterinsurgency thinking and practices derived from colonial experiences elsewhere' (O'Dowd, Rolston and Tomlinson 1980: 201). This strategy developed over time and has been inflected according to both the party in power and perhaps more importantly the balance of forces at any one time. For example, the strategy of criminalization adopted by the British

state following the collapse of the power sharing executive in 1974 stressed the essential criminality of the assault on the state by abolishing 'special category status' for political offences. During Roy Mason's term as secretary of state, in the late 1970s, this was supplemented with an attempt to portray the problems of Northern Ireland as not simply emanating from 'terrorism' but also from the evils of unemployment. Thus in 1979 Mason could claim that 'We have created a package of financial inducements which is one of the best in Europe' (cited in ibid.: 77). This compares with the approach of the Thatcher government, at least in the early 1980s, which introduced the rhetoric of self-reliance as well as cut-backs and increasing unemployment. More recently there has been a much greater emphasis on social and economic matters and particularly on industrial regeneration and development. This priority runs in tandem with the campaign against 'terrorism'. However, economic regeneration is often not seen as an end in itself. Instead the creation of jobs is seen as contributing to counter-insurgency strategies. As Richard Needham, minister for the economy at the NIO, has put it:

> It has to be in our interests . . . for us to try and get more jobs in West Belfast . . . that is the way in which we will reduce the terrorist menace. By making people economically independent from terrorism, that is the prime strategic objective of the government.
>
> ('Newsbreak', BBC Radio Ulster, November 1989; cited in West Belfast Economic Forum 1990: 38)

Most research studies which have concentrated on the analysis of news coverage or on the production of news have tended to ignore or play down attempts to communicate the reform part of the NIO strategy. Nevertheless, it has assumed a very important role in the approach of the NIIS which stresses two basic messages: on the one hand, that the problem is the terrorist 'assault on democracy' (NIO 1989: 20), and, on the other, that the people of 'Ulster' are 'a community on the move' in which local 'entrepeneurial flair' and 'Ulster generosity' are 'rendering bigotry irrelevant' (ibid.: 72).

The attempt to convince the world that Northern Ireland is getting 'back to normal' has been massively funded. A large proportion of all NIO expenditure on press, public relations and advertising is spent on this approach.[3]

Because of the perceived difficulty of getting good news into the media, the Information Service itself has two staff who produce 'good news' stories for an international market, partly working through the Central Office of Information (COI) and their London Press Service. They attempt to 'place' these stories in suspecting and unsuspecting magazines and newspapers. Naturally, they are free of charge or copyright restrictions. Additionally, in 1990 the Industrial Development Board replaced their PR

consultants Burson Marstellar with PR firm Shandwick and paid them £3.5 million for the first year of a contract, which included supplying the world's media with good news stories from a news bureau set up in Belfast.

The day of the men and women of peace

To illustrate the dual approach of the NIO I want to give some examples from the publicity booklet produced by the Information Service, in July 1989, for the twentieth anniversary of the redeployment of British troops.[4] Ten thousand copies were produced and, according to the NIO, distributed to 'MPs, the media, opinion formers and those interested in Northern Ireland' (*Fortnight*, September 1989). It is a large glossy publication full of photographs and reproductions of press clippings and is divided into five chapters which address the 'perceptions and realities' (NIO 1989: 1) of Northern Ireland. Opening with a review of the civil rights campaign of the 1960s, a list of campaigners' demands is counterposed with a list of 'reforms' to suggest that civil rights grievances have been met (Figure 4.1). Since then British governments have 'worked to create sufficient cross community consensus to restore an agreed measure of self-government to Northern Ireland' (ibid.: 7) Once it has been established that the British are simply trying to bring the two sides together we can move on to the 'real' problem of Northern Ireland which is 'terrorism'.

In chapter 2 ('Attacking the community') the message on the 'terrorists' comes to the fore with a series of images of the death and destruction caused by the IRA (although loyalist 'terrorists' are mentioned there is only one photograph of identified loyalist violence compared with eighteen of victims of the IRA) (Figure 4.2). The conflict in Northern Ireland is due, in this version, to the 'evil dreams of evil men' who manipulate people so that:

> Young men and women with the normal aspirations of marriage and family and the ability to hold down good jobs needlessly spend years in prison as the penalty for listening to the evil dreams of evil men. And some die. That, too, represents part of the tragedy of Northern Ireland. Not only do PIRA kill, they do so with a cynicism which is a total perversion . . . .

(NIO 1989: 14)

We might then ask what the government is doing to combat these 'evil' men. Chapter 3, 'Protecting the community', gives us the answer: 'keeping the peace and maintaining law and order' (ibid.: 32). The 'wickedness of terrorism' requires that the police and army be portrayed as able to deal adequately with the 'terrorist threat', while at the same time the presentation of the army and police as peacekeepers requires that the police are seen as part of 'the community'. As one commentator noted: 'The major

CIVIL RIGHTS DEMANDS (1969)	THE RESPONSE
One Man – One Vote	✓ One Man – One Vote Introduced
New Electoral Boundaries	✓ Electoral Boundaries Redrawn
Ban Religious Discrimination	✓ Religious Discrimination Banned
Fair Housing Allocation	✓ Housing Executive Established
Disband 'B' Specials	✓ 'B' Specials Disbanded
Repeal Special Powers Act	✓ Special Powers Act Repealed

The Civil Rights campaign - students confront the police in Belfast

Figure 4.1 According to the Northern Ireland Office, civil rights grievances have been met

problem for the authors of chapter three was how to make the RUC appear tough enough to cope with the boys in chapter two and still be friendly local bobbies' (Odling-Smee 1989: 14–15). The way the NIO tries to resolve this tension is to deploy visual images of friendly, helpful-looking police men and women. As well as one photo of policemen carrying a coffin there are four of officers helping children or giving directions, patrolling the streets or chatting with pedestrians (Figure 4.3). There is only one photograph in the whole booklet in which members of the police appear armed. In a bizarre expression of this tension between the
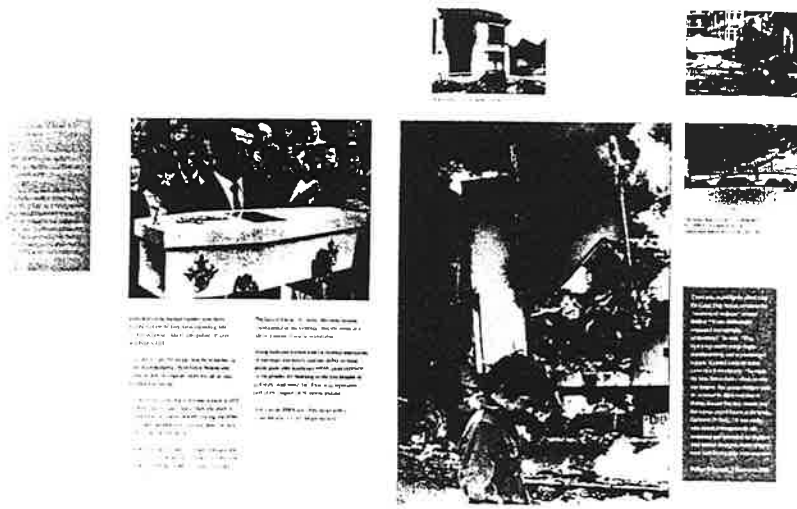
Figure 4.2 The 'evil' activities of the IRA contrasted with, *Figure 4.3*, the friendly bobbies of the RUC

'anti-terrorist' and 'local bobby' images, the officers are seen wearing plastic red noses and laughing as they point their guns at the camera (Figure 4.4).

The point of such images, as the text makes clear, is to reinforce the notion that Northern Ireland is a society getting back to 'normal'. This is why there is such an emphasis on the low crime rate and the repetition of a common official normalizing anecdote about deaths on the roads being twice as common as deaths 'at the hands of a terrorist' (NIO 1989: 36).

By the end of chapter 3 we have already started to shift to the images of what is called a 'community on the move'. Chapter 4 deals with Ulster's achievements in industrial development and employment, agriculture, innovation and culture. It argues that successive British governments have shown a 'high degree of commitment' to Northern Ireland by subsidizing public expenditure and trying to attract overseas investment (ibid.: 44). There are many colour photographs showing some of the developments supported by the Industrial Development Board (Figure 4.5) while the text reveals the 'excellent job' done by the board in attracting investment. There are no images of poverty or underdevelopment in this section. What is not mentioned is that, according to the Northern Ireland Economic Council, much United States investment does not stay very long and that investment by some companies, for example the Ford Motor Company, has led to net job losses (Obair 1991). Ironically for a chapter titled 'a community on the move' there is no room to mention the problems caused
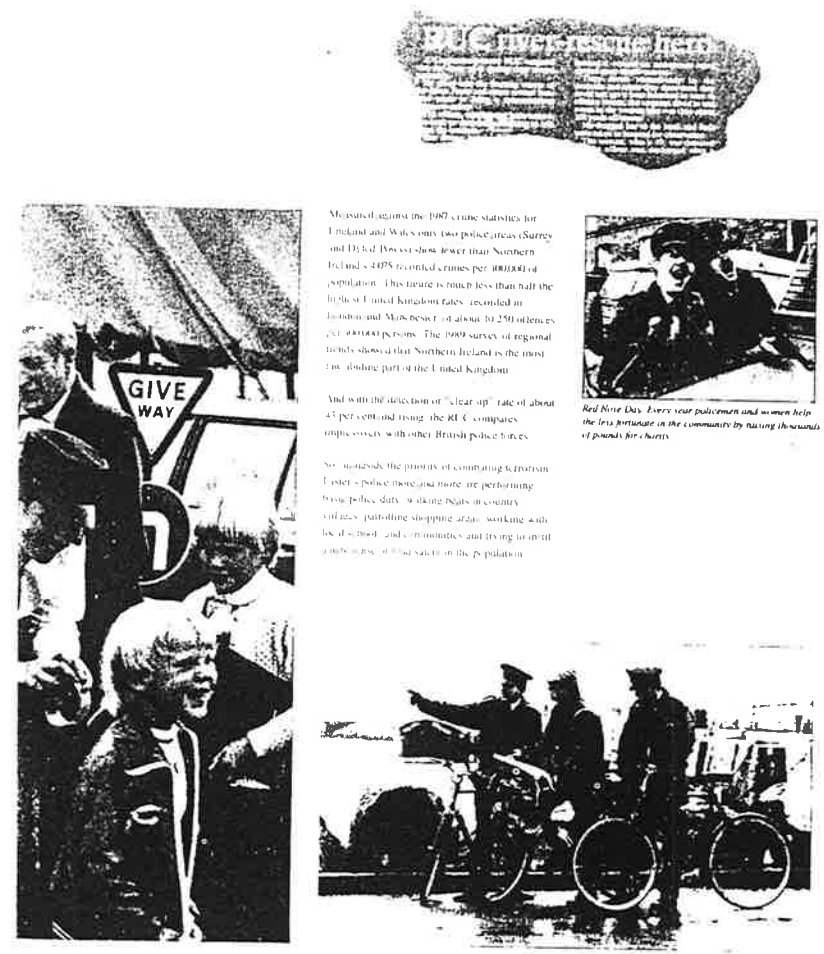
Figure 4.3

by the large physical movement of population out of Northern Ireland via emigration.[5] Chapter 5 relays rosy images of the 'new spirit' through which 'new attitudes and new frameworks for equality and mutual understanding' (NIO 1989: 64) will be created with the help of the British government.

The conclusion sums up the twin approach. After arguing that the public, media induced, perception of Northern Ireland is wrong, it goes on to stress the official version of the counter-insurgency strategy of the state:

In reality, the community, together with Government and the forces of

Red Nose Day. Every year policemen and women help the less fortunate in the community by raising thousands of pounds for charity.

Figure 4.4 The laughing policemen

law, order and justice, is determined to succeed. It resists the small band of terrorists with a resilience which is impressive. It is coming to grips with its historic legacies, resolved to break their stranglehold. The economic and sectarian chains which have bound it for too long are slowly but inexorably being loosened.

(NIO 1989: 72)

Here we have the familiar themes of the 'community' upon whose backs the 'small band of terrorists' prey. The government in this construction is on the same side as '*the* community' which is coming to grips with '*its* historic legacies'. The key proposition here is that the problems of Northern Ireland are nothing to do with the British government or the NIO. The position of the NIO in all this is that of a neutral observer or at most a facilitator for the Irish to sort out *their own* problems. The only
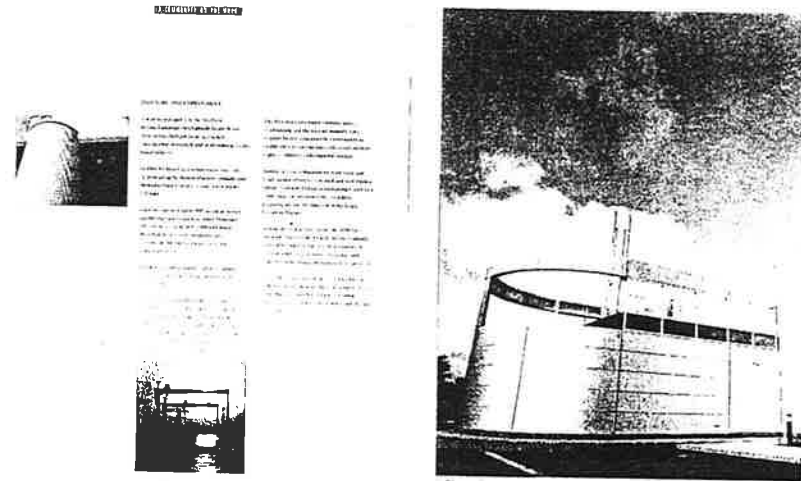
Figure 4.5 'A community on the move'

reason for the continued British presence is the democratic wish of the protestant majority to remain British.

Once this definition of the British role is laid out the argument moves on to the reform strand of NIO strategy emphasizing the 'nice' side of 'Ulster':

The future begins to look brighter. Civic, family and personal pride are still intact. Space is being created to allow Ulster generosity to express itself in an ever increasing number of ways. Mutual respect and a willingness to appreciate the other's point of view are rendering bigotry irrelevant.

Faith in the future is stronger than ever.

(ibid.: 72)

In this view the solution to the conflict is an end to bigoted attitudes which are to be replaced by cross community co-operation. The existence of the border, the presence of British troops and indeed the overall role of Britain in Ireland are evidently not at issue.

SOME KEY THEMES

A key claim of official propaganda and of counter-insurgency theorists has been that IRA propaganda delivers variable messages to variable audiences (e.g., Tugwell 1981). The evidence for this is often Maria McGuire's 1973 memoir, *To Take Arms: A Year in the Provisional IRA*. It

is quoted, for example, in an unattributable Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) briefing paper which starts by arguing that:

> The claim of the provisional IRA to be the champion of Irish Nationalism overseas is accepted by many Americans of Irish origin, from whom it derives considerable support. . . . Elsewhere, however, support comes largely from Communist, Trotskyist and other extremist and anti-western groups – a fact which the Provisionals are careful not to publicise in America.
>
> (FCO 1981:1)

Some politicians apparently believe the briefings they are given and reproduce them in their memoirs. Jim Prior for example, who was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from 1981 to 1984, has argued that what the IRA 'really want' is: 'The destruction of Democracy, and its replacement by a Marxist Irish state, which in time might threaten the whole of Western security' (Prior 1986: 221). But claims like this were apparently only meant for certain eyes. The case of the 'Marxist conspiracy' was, according to a senior information officer, 'a purely American oriented projection', which:

> was fairly calculated and cool, simply that just telling America that an actor, for example, has communist tendencies, and he ain't going to work any more. Tell them that the IRA is a Marxist-Leninist conspiracy and people are going to say 'Well. . . .'
>
> (interview with author. December 1990)

The aim of this type of material is clearly to suggest the dishonesty and hypocrisy of the republican movement. It is ironic that briefing documents like this one are themselves mainly intended for United States and international distribution and that the Marxist revolutionaries line is not for distribution in Britain or Ireland nor is it promoted by the Information Service to British journalists (see also Rolston 1991: 161).

Another view promoted by the FCO and NIO has been the 'terrorist international' favoured by some counter-insurgency theorists (Sterling 1981; Wilkinson 1977). An analysis of unattributable briefing papers issued by the information department of the FCO reveals that this theme is often returned to (see, for example, FCO 1981, 1984, 1988b). This view tends to rest on two sorts of evidence. First, when the IRA were found to be in possession of weapons manufactured in the (former) eastern bloc it was implied that these countries supported the IRA (McKinley 1987), although when the IRA use arms manufactured in western countries this argument is not advanced. Second, the existence of 'Irish solidarity' groups in European countries is often taken to imply connections between 'terrorist' groups in France, Spain, Holland or Germany and the IRA.[6]

Following the killing of WPC Fletcher outside the Libyan Peoples' Bureau in London in 1984 and the United States bombing of Libya in 1986.

the Libyan connection became one of the major themes of official propaganda (FCO 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1988a, 1988b). Evidence of IRA attempts to obtain arms from Libya first surfaced in 1973 with the interception of arms aboard the *Claudia*. In the run up to and aftermath of the 1986 bombing of Libya, the United States government had constructed Libya as a major threat to western security. President Reagan had included Libya in his list of 'outlaw states' run by the 'strangest collection of misfits, looney tunes and squalid criminals since the advent of the Third Reich' (cited in Jenkins 1988: 7).

At the NIO and FCO the climate in the United States was seen as a good opportunity to influence United States opinion. As one information officer observed, the Libyan connection had 'bugger all to do with internal government or policy' (interview with author, December 1990). The capture of the *Eksund* in 1987, followed by reports that between 1985 and 1987 four shipments of arms and explosives had reached the IRA, gave a further boost to the campaign (Taylor 1988). The fact that these shipments included arms and plastic explosive of Czech manufacture allowed the NIO and FCO to imply eastern bloc involvement although there was, and remains, precious little evidence of this. The Libyan/Czech connection, though, was not only used in the United States. But when it was used in Britain this was partly in order to maintain the belief in the United States that it was not simply a 'line'. As one information officer argued: 'It was more or less to give credibility to emphasising it abroad. . . . It would look bloody stupid if we were talking about Libya and Czechoslovakia in America and nobody here [in the UK] was informed about it' (interview with author, December 1990). Another important reason for emphasizing the Libyan connection in Britain was the possible secondary effect of this in the United States. As well as targeting different audiences through different groups of journalists and emphasizing different themes (where appropriate) to each, a long established technique of NIO publicity has been the importance attached to who is perceived to be delivering a message. It is to this approach that we now turn.

Who speaks?

If the lobby system or off-the-record briefings are useful in disguising the source of an official statement, they may still indicate that information emanates from official sources and as such, to a suspicious audience, they may be tainted (Cockerell, Hennessy and Walker, 1984; Margach 1978). How much better it would be to be able to put over your view by using the public words of other people, who might be thought to be independent or even critical of the state. Early NIO broadsheets and leaflets often used this device to attempt to show that influential opinion was on their side. For example, the then director of British Information Services in New

York told the expenditure committee of the House of Commons in 1973 that:

> Some of the most effective material in this context comes from Dublin: from the statements of the last Prime Minister, Mr Lynch, the Cardinal, Cardinal Conway, and the former Irish Minister of Justice, Mr O'Malley, particularly on such matters as denouncing the support given in the USA to the IRA in way of funds.
>
> (Commons Expenditure Committee 1973: 18)

More recently, the glossy booklet issued by the NIO in July 1989 for the twentieth anniversary of the redeployment of British troops in Northern Ireland uses an assortment of quotes from politicians, religious figures, an American businessman and even George Bush. The title itself uses the words of Cahal Daly the then Bishop of Down and Connor: 'The day of the Men and Women of Peace Must Surely Come' (NIO 1989).[7] The philosophy of this approach was explained in the confidential planning notes of the film *Northern Ireland Chronicle* which were leaked in 1981. It argued that statements about the criminality of those convicted for 'scheduled' offences would be: 'far more cogently made by, say, a Catholic bishop than . . . by any on-or-off-screen Government spokesman'. But it was not just interviewees from the British government who might not be convincing. Unionist politicians too were out, particularly since the target audience for the film was (and remains) the United States.[8] The unionists:

> are the people whom the film's target audience . . . would be most inclined to reject. That Molyneux would speak out against the IRA is obvious; that, say, John Hume or Bishop Daly would might be a revelation. These are the people who, in terms of the film, will carry the most authority and have the most 'muscle'.
>
> (cited in Curtis 1984: 200)

More recently the Information Service has attempted to have their message carried by Irish diplomats, SDLP politicians and Northern Ireland trades unionists as well as former politicians such as Paddy Devlin, particularly in relation to the British campaign against the MacBride principles of fair employment. Sometimes these approaches are done without the permission of the people who are used. Curtis notes that John Hume and Edward Daly were 'furious' when they found out they were being used in *Northern Ireland Chronicle* (Curtis 1984: 201).[9]

Academics are another potentially valuable resource for the information manager. If they can be supplied with detailed information which is then reproduced in books this lends more credibility to the arguments of the Information Service. Many of these writers are ex-military and some have had first-hand practical experience of 'psychological warfare' campaigns in Ireland (see, for example, Clutterbuck 1981; Evelegh 1978; Hooper 1982;

Kitson 1971, 1987; Tugwell 1973, 1981, 1987). The reproduction of the arguments of the NIO or FCO is sometimes not even accompanied by rewriting and whole passages of briefing documents have found their way verbatim into published work. For example, volume 1 of Barzilay's four volume study of the *British Army in Ulster* (Barzilay 1973) includes large sections of a Foreign Office, Information Research Department (IRD) briefing, *The IRA: Aims, Policy, Tactics*.[10] The NIO or the FCO can then use the writings of academics as impartial and independent commentaries. The academics themselves may then be called upon by journalists as 'experts' on 'terrorism' (see George 1991; Herman and O'Sullivan 1989, 1991; and Schlesinger 1978, for more details on 'terrorology').

In the case of the Libyan connection the usefulness of plugging the line in Britain was not only to ensure that it was convincing for United States journalists. There was a potential secondary pay-off in personal and business contacts. It was seen as important that people in Britain and Northern Ireland were 'informed' about the Libyan connection in the event of visiting the United States. Members of the business community were seen as particularly useful in this area:

> It was useful that [a business person] felt that there was a Libya/ Czechoslovakia connection, so if he were talking as an independent businessman in America to people he would have a line that was credible to him as well as to Americans to whom he spoke.
>
> (interview with author, December 1990)

The constant attention paid to the right message delivered by the right person was also influenced by the mode of delivery. For many years the perceived problem for both the Northern Ireland government and latterly the NIO in presenting themselves in the United States was that there was no full-time officer devoted to Northern Ireland in the diplomatic service. In addition the officers who did deal with Northern Ireland were British. In the late 1940s the Unionist administration of Basil Brooke attempted to have an 'Ulsterman' positioned in the United States in an information role in order to mitigate these two obstacles. The Foreign Office was not keen and rejected the advance. It was not until the H-Block crisis in 1980 that the FCO relented. According to its then head, Patrick Nixon, this was partly because British Information Services in New York found that Northern Ireland became 'the biggest single item of government policy' they were called on to explain ('File on Four', BBC Radio 4, 23 November 1982). As Jenkins and Sloman point out: 'For years the Foreign Office was criticised for failing to put across the government's case on Ulster, sending diplomats with plummy accents to defend the thesis that Ulster people really did want "the British to stay" ' (1985: 83). The solution was to send the press officer from the Northern Ireland Department of the

Environment in Belfast on a four-year secondment. Cyril Gray was clear about the advantages of not having a 'plummy' accent:

> I find it quite remarkable the impact that an obvious Irish accent has on often very difficult Irish-American audiences. They may be many generations out from Ireland, they have a very imperfect, inaccurate knowledge of Ireland. Nonetheless, they do ask very detailed questions at all times and, to be frank, it's the only kind of detail you could know if you are yourself Irish and have been there.
>
> (cited in ibid.: 83)

TACTICS – TARGETING THE AUDIENCE

The differential targeting of some messages implies that the NIIS recognizes and exploits the varying work routines of different groups of journalists. It operates what we might call a 'hierarchy of access'. However, this general hierarchy is traversed by media type and by professional and personal relationships. For example, there have periodically been complaints from writing journalists that better facilities are offered to broadcast journalists. Indeed, in late 1981 the then Northern Ireland Secretary Jim Prior was threatened with a news black out by the National Union of Journalists if the practice continued (*Belfast Telegraph*, 30 September 1981; *Sunday World*, 1 November 1981). Additionally, there are clear differences within as well as between media types, for example, between news reporters and features writers or TV documentary-makers. Journalists may move between different positions as their careers progress or they may be simultaneously working in more than one capacity. The relationship of any given group of journalists with the NIO is also constantly in flux. Nevertheless it is possible to categorize four main politico-geographical groups of journalists who are treated in distinct ways in relation to the hierarchy operated by the Information Service: Dublin journalists; local journalists, who work for regional newspapers, or broadcast outlets; journalists for London-based media outlets (including both Belfast and London resident news reporters and TV current affairs and documentary-makers); international journalists both London- and home-based.

Dublin

Carrying on a tradition which goes back at least thirty years, Dublin journalists seem to be the least favoured of all those who cover the situation in Northern Ireland. This can perhaps best be illustrated by the treatment accorded to Garret Fitzgerald, the former Taoiseach (prime minister) of the Republic of Ireland, when he worked as a journalist. In

1960 the NIIS was approached by Fitzgerald in his position as the Dublin correspondent of the *Financial Times* for information on economic affairs in Northern Ireland. The Information Service was not keen and tried to exert pressure on the *Financial Times* to drop Fitzgerald in favour of their existing Northern Ireland correspondent, who unsurprisingly worked for a unionist paper in Belfast. The director of the Information Service was moved to write a memorandum for the Cabinet Publicity Committee of the Northern Ireland government giving details of Fitzgerald's background and arguing that:

> Any Dublin writer wishing to become a commentator on Northern affairs should be discouraged as far as can tactfully be managed and that no special arrangements should be made to supply him with press releases. The fact that Fitzgerald is a very able economist and writer and that he has got a firm foothold in the *Financial Times* and the *Economist* Intelligence Unit as well as a link with overseas papers makes it all the more important tht we should keep our services to him to a minimum in an effort to restrict his scope to the South. Whatever about economics being non-political, Fitzgeralds viewpoint and sympathies are Southern and this must colour all his writings.
>
> (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland CAB9F/123/72 Memo from Eric Montgomery, 18 March 1960)

The publicity committee chaired by the Prime Minister Basil Brooke agreed with the director of information and concluded that: 'the Director should continue to provide only the basic minimum co-operation with Dublin writers as at present' (PRONI CAB9F/123/72, Minutes of 97th Cabinet Publicity Committee meeting, 23 March 1960).

In the last twenty years there have been many allegations from Dublin journalists that they are denied information given to others. When the director of Information Services tried to set up a lobby system in the mid-1970s it was Dublin journalists who got the blame for breaking it up. From the point of view of the NIO, a group lobby system was impossible because while: 'the locals and to a great extent the Nationals obeyed the rules . . . there were others, particularly from the South of Ireland who simply didn't obey the rules and you got shopped' (interview with author, August 1989).

The practice of the Information Service has been shaped by the perception that Dublin journalists are more likely to be critical of the NIO. They are, in effect, a lost cause. This perception is related to the history of the Information Service as much as it is to the practice of Dublin journalists. In 1970, for example, four new appointments were made to the Information Service. Three of the four were reported as having family connections with either the ruling unionist party or with existing information officers. *Private Eye* reported scathingly that their job would be 'to tell the world that the days of Government-sponsored favouritism, discrimination and nepotism

are over' (2 February 1970). By 1972 there was apparently only one Catholic member of staff in the Information Service (*Irish News*, 9 May 1972) The NIO, perhaps more than any other government department has had great continuity of staffing in its press office. In 1987 when the director, David Gilliland, retired, the top four posts at Stormont were occupied by information officers who had been in the Information Service since at least 1970 when the Northern Ireland government was still in existence. Nevertheless one experienced British journalist has recounted his 'shock' when he encountered 'what I would call racism from the Northern Ireland Office in the way they spoke about Dublin journalists. . . . Oh "it's him from another country" sort of old-fashioned Protestant racism really. . . . Their calls aren't returned. I witnessed that' (interview with author, January 1991).

But it is not simply individual attitudes which determine this practice. Rather it is a complex blend of the perceived critical nature of Dublin journalists, the relative lack of importance of public opinion in the south to the NIO, and the general political orientations of British policy.

Local vs British journalists

When journalists who work for media in the north of Ireland are denied access by the NIO it is often in favour of journalists working for British national outlets, particularly TV current affairs or lobby journalists. I will therefore deal with local and British journalists together. Because the audience for the local media is by and large limited to Northern Ireland a journalist on a local paper is likely to be well down the hierarchy of access of the Information Service. As one senior information officer related:

Local journalists with the best will in the world are simply local journalists. Their interests are in the Northern Ireland scene and just occasionally they will ask, how is Northern Ireland going to be affected by Nuclear legislation, or whatever, and so briefings for local journalists were simply about the nitty gritty of every day Secretary of State and Ministerial life and there was never any deep political probing. . . . I haven't met one single Northern Ireland Journalist who was worth five minutes of my time.

(interview with author, August 1989)

In an early, and less than subtle, example of the practice that goes with this view, recounted here by Henry Kelly, William Whitelaw's PR officer, Keith McDowall, attempted to exclude all but correspondents for London papers.

For several days towards the end of last week, Mr McDowall gave confidential 'lobby' briefings about what the Secretary of State had been

doing during the day. But these were confined to English reporters only. No Belfast based papers were invited to send reporters, never mind Dublin based Irish dailies or evenings.

(*Irish Times*, 6 April 1972)

Local journalists often resent this treatment. Some protest to the NIO about the facilities they are offered. For example, in 1989 one Belfast-based journalist proposed a TV programme which would have involved filming on patrol with the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR). Following initial briefings the proposal was apparently referred to the top of the UDR and then to the NIO, who turned it down. Some months after this BBC 1's *Panorama* team were allowed the access to the UDR denied to the local journalists. But they did not come up with a cosy portrait, suggesting instead that members of the UDR have close links with loyalist paramilitaries. The programme revealed that at least 197 members of the overwhelmingly protestant regiment had been convicted for 'terrorist', sectarian or other serious offences, including seventeen convicted of murder (*Panorama*, BBC 1, 19 February 1990). *Panorama* also revealed that only NCOs and above are briefed on loyalist paramilitary suspects, 'on the grounds that if the Other Ranks were given the information they would tip off the suspects' (*Observer*, 25 February 1990).

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke, was moved to write to the UDR commanding officer and release the letter to the press, arguing in morale-boosting fashion that the programme was a 'smear' on the whole regiment (*Guardian*, 20 February 1990). The access given to *Panorama* led to complaints to the NIO by local journalists. One recounted: 'My argument was that we were much more sympathetic to the local situation, from whatever side, simply because we knew the nuances and the delicacies of the situation much better' (interview with author, August 1990).

The proximity of local journalists to the NIIS means that they are much more often in touch with it as a regular source than journalists who work for network current affairs programmes. Because of their work-cycle with daily deadlines, news reporters on the three Belfast dailies are more frequently in touch with their major sources than their colleagues who work on BBC Northern Ireland or Ulster Television current affairs programmes or even on the Belfast Sunday press. Local daily news reporters tell of their daily routine involving the regular 'ring-round' of sources and half-hourly 'check calls' to the police press office.

This close daily contact for staple items of news and the latest events to follow up means that the availability of a regular flow of news items is more crucial on a day-to-day basis. This often means that British or overseas journalists view local journalists as more easily manipulated. As one London-based television producer put it:

Sometimes you do upset them [the NIO], and we can afford then to let them go and not talk to them for a year, that's happened. . . . If you're local you have to deal with them on a daily basis, you can't do it. Therefore the room for manipulation and abuse by the Northern Ireland Office with local journalists is much more acute.

(interview with author, January 1991)

Indeed, in his study of the Information Service, Hardy found that, over a three-month period, the three Belfast dailies used between 57 and 68 per cent of NIO press releases as the basis for news stories (Hardy 1983: 49), and that the transformation process they were put through was often slight. As he has related:

Attached to each press release there are things called Notes to Editors, which are supposed to be a government analysis of its own facts and figures and quite often I found that, in fact very often, you have journalists using these Notes to Editors as their own analysis.

(Hard News, Channel Four, 19 October 1989)

When access is denied to local journalists, it may be in favour of London-based media outlets, with the emphasis on television current affairs programmes. In the hierarchy of access, media outlets which cover all of the 'United Kingdom' are more important for many messages. But public opinion in general may sometimes be an incidental target for image-conscious ministers. The suspicion of thwarted local journalists is that Northern Ireland ministers, none of whom are actually elected by Northern Ireland voters, can sometimes be more interested in their profile in government or in their own political party or constituency than the content of the message. More centrally, though, the local media in the six counties of Northern Ireland is not read by the British establishment or the 'opinion formers' which the Information Service targets.

But 'national' newspapers are not such a captive market for regular press releases. Because they devote less coverage to Northern Ireland they are also likely to put a press statement through a greater process of transformation before it hits the paper or screen. Other researchers have pointed out that journalists throw most press releases in the bin (Tiffen 1989: 74) but it also depends on which journalists and whose press releases they are.

In London being frozen out from a particular government department is not nearly as great a hardship as it is in Belfast. According to some journalists this *relative* lack of power is recognized by the Information Service who are 'more cautious' with London journalists 'because [the journalists] would write the story of how the Northern Ireland Office tried to manipulate me. [The Information Service] don't want that story, they are very sophisticated in their judgement' (interview with author, January 1991). Nevertheless, this does not mean that British reporting *is* more

critical than local reporting. Some researchers have pointed to the relative openness and higher proportion of political news in the local news media compared with national news (Elliot 1977). Indeed, Belfast-based journalists (on the local media as well as for London outlets) are often sceptical about their London-based colleagues' lack of knowledge about Irish events or the ease with which they are taken in by official briefings. In this view London journalists who fly in for irregular and brief assignments are referred to as 'fire brigade' units or 'parachutists'. When Secretary of State, Peter Brooke, said in an interview, to mark 100 days in office, that the IRA could not be defeated militarily many London journalists, following briefings from the NIO, interpreted his remarks as a deliberate indication of a policy change. But, as the NIO later privately acknowledged, Brooke's remarks were a 'gaffe' (*Sunday Tribune*, 20 August 1989). Belfast-based political correspondent Eamon Mallie, who was actually present when Brooke made the remarks, thus referred scathingly to the London press as 'remote control' writers (*Fortnight*, December 1989).

The point is not whether journalists on national media do or do not push harder for information, nor is it a question of which group of journalists are the 'best'. These differences between the various local and national media can be partly explained by the strategies and priorities of sources like the NIO which release information selectively. Thus a front-page lead on Northern Ireland in the *Belfast Telegraph* might not be accepted by the *Daily Telegraph* which would require a different type of Northern Ireland story to feature it on the front page.

International journalists

A final key area of interest for the NIO is international opinion. Information work for journalists from other countries involves additional tactics not used for British or Irish journalists as well as messages which emphasize more heavily the 'positive aspects' of Northern Ireland.

Interest in overseas journalists is again subject to a hierarchy of access. Journalists from western countries are seen as more important than journalists from what was the eastern bloc or the Third World. Indeed, journalists from eastern Europe have, on occasion, even been refused official co-operation and prevented from setting foot in Northern Ireland. At the time of the H-Block protests two Soviet journalists were told by the British authorities that they were 'Unfortunately unable to make available the facilities for interviews at the time requested and, in these circumstances . . . it was probably best that they should not make the trip' (*Irish Times*, 19 March 1980). Even among western journalists degrees of access can depend on the importance to the British government of the country they are from. French and German journalists, for example, are higher up the priority list than their counterparts from Norway, Denmark, Sweden or

Finland. When confronted with a Scandinavian TV crew, one information officer explained:

> That gave me a real pain in the head, because I have no interest in what Sweden or Norway thought. I really don't care, because it isn't going to affect the situation of HMG one little bit. . . . But Paris is different. French, Germans, in particular Parisian journalists, I make a fair bit of time for.
>
> (interview with author, August 1989)

But the main target for information efforts overseas has long been the United States of America. This is because of the large Irish-American community in the United States and its effect through elections and lobbying on United States politics. America is an ally and can exert some influence on British government policy. It is also because the republican movement has many supporters in the United States. One information officer explained the thinking of the Information Service:

> The prime target as far as I was concerned were American journalists, because they were the people . . . we had to get to . . . because they really could influence policy in terms of [the] United Kingdom. Because here was the leading nation in the Western world [and] if the US government had thought that the United Kingdom was wrong in their policy towards Ireland . . . then somehow one had to get the opinion formers onside. And so I devoted a great deal of my time to the American journalists . . . to see if we couldn't possibly influence opinion there. And if you could influence the media then you could influence the senators, Congress and eventually perhaps, the White House.
>
> (interview with author, August 1989)

In London the major targets among American reporters were the heads of bureaux because:

> I took the view that . . . they were high flyers in their own papers and if one got to know them while they were in London and if you never sold them a bum steer – some day somewhere at some time you might get to see them in America when they were bigger guys . . . And I must say that proved a very effective thing to do.
>
> (interview with author, August 1989)

Activities in the United States

In the United States itself editorial boards of the major newspapers and business people have been the most visible targets of information officers and politicians. One typical journey for Tom King, when he was secretary of state, took him from 'the World Trade Centre, where he hosted a lunch

for businessmen in the 107th-floor restaurant, downtown to meet the editorial board of the *New York Times*' (McKittrick 1989: 21). The targeting of editorial writers, rather than news journalists who visit Northern Ireland more routinely, has meant many trips by successive secretaries of state to the United States accompanied by press officers and other officials. In the view of the Information Service this tactic has been a great success. The long-time director of the Information Service, David Gilliland, has argued that:

> Although the wire service reporting of events in Northern Ireland still tends to concentrate on the sensational, the *editorial* comment which is very important in the United States in the more serious newspapers and indeed on television and radio displays a much greater understanding of the problems and a greater sympathy with the policies of Her Majesty's Government than was apparent in previous times . . . . Where, as we frequently have done, we have sat down and patiently explained the background to the problems and the policy measures that have been adopted, we have found a sympathetic and responsive audience and that has been reflected in editorial comment throughout the United States.
>
> (Gilliland 1983: 7)

DISCUSSION – PROBLEMS OF CONTAINMENT

I have argued that the approach of the NIIS embodies the dual strategy of the British state to the Northern Ireland problem. There are a variety of public relations techniques available to any organization, but while I have not explored many of the techniques used by the NIO, I have tried to explore the broad tactical way in which they are used. However, even the most powerful source cannot always be guaranteed the profile in the media that it would like. The NIO experiences many problems in its encounters with the media even at the broadest level of strategy. While strategy is inflected according to the government in power or in relation to the balance of forces at any given time, there is a sense in which the major contradiction at the heart of NIO public relations remains the same. It is to this problem that I now turn.

There is a practical difficulty for media strategies in the dual approach which simultaneously emphasizes the 'wickedness of terrorism' and a 'community on the move'. There is evidence that this was recognized by the NIO in the month of its creation in March 1972. The first (and last) major piece of propaganda produced by the NIIS for the Unionist government was a booklet, *The Terror and the Tears* (Figure 4.6), published in March 1972 in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday when British troops shot and killed thirteen unarmed civil rights marchers. In the words of one information officer: 'We thought that the IRA were being portrayed as

Figure 4.6 The Terror and the Tears: British officials thought it distasteful

freedom fighters – glamour boys in trench coats. We hope this dossier will show them to be what they really are – thugs with blood dripping from their hands' (*Daily Mirror*, 4 March 1972). The sixteen-page booklet did this with a series of photographs of victims of the IRA.[11] Around 100,000 copies were printed with the Unionist government ordering a further 150,000 just before Direct Rule was introduced (*Irish Times*, 22 March 1972). One hundred and twenty thousand copies were distributed much to the apparent 'distaste' (The *Times*, 27 August 1974) of the British government, which ceased general distribution of the booklet from 24 March, the very day of the introduction of Direct Rule.[12] Loftus reports that advertisers were then 'restrained' by a government/army/police committee which believed that 'at times overstressing security gave the government a poor image and that it was advisable to soft pedal' (Loftus 1980: 73).

More recently in a rare public speech in 1983, the then director of the Information Service spelt out the tensions within their approach:

> If we are to impress upon people abroad that the channelling of money or equipment to organisations within the province on one side of the community or the other which will contribute to violence is wrong, then we do have to show publicly the uses to which that money or equipment is put. By doing so we run the risk of leading people in industry or business to conclude that Northern Ireland is not a sufficiently stable community within which to commit their resources. It is a very real dilemma.
>
> (Gilliland 1983: 7)

In practice the attempt to resolve this dilemma is to emphasize that the 'terrorists' are only a tiny minority. It was something of an embarrassment then, when, in the early 1980s, Sinn Fein started contesting elections and winning around 40 per cent of the nationalist vote. Despite these difficulties of strategy the NIO and other official sources (most notably the RUC) continue to promote the anti-terrorist image. It is therefore somewhat disingenuous of the NIO to omit to mention their role in the creation of the 'bad image' of Northern Ireland when they argue that 'the violent images that have shaped the world's perception of the Province have also made it more difficult to achieve economic and industrial regeneration' (NIO 1989: 44).

CONCLUSION

While there may be a range of techniques and tactics available to source organizations, the evidence here suggests that the particular tactics used depends partly on the aim and strategy of the source rather than on which techniques are available. Some research attempts to catalogue the skills and stratagems sources use (even if they explicitly reject such an approach)

(Chibnall 1977; Tiffen 1989). But these general pictures of the available range tend to see the media as homogeneous and do not differentiate between the different audience agendas which sources attempt to influence. We have seen that the NIO adopts quite distinct strategies and themes for dealing with distinct groups of journalists and operates what I have called a hierarchy of access.

One advantage of an approach which analyses the strategies of particular government departments or power blocs in parallel to considerations of their media profile is that we can much more clearly assess their relative strengths and, at least as importantly, their relative weaknesses (Bruck 1989). This approach also allows for a consideration of the *developing* strategy of the NIO and moves us away from the narrow and static snapshot which is the result of some theoretical approaches based on content analysis.

The NIO does not just highlight violence. They also want 'good news' coverage which does not automatically fit with the news values operated by many media outlets. In other words there are real problems and dilemmas of strategy for the NIO. In addition there are a number of factors which potentially limit the ability of the NIO to dominate the news in all the ways they would wish.

More broadly, though, the fact that the war is not called a war is testament to the power of official sources. The NIO is not above the fray, instead it has pursued a strategy which bolsters certain conceptions of the conflict and marginalizes others, such that certain solutions follow. The presentation of Britain as neutral in the conflict is part of a deliberate counter-insurgency strategy in which the NIIS plays a key role. However successful the Information Service is in managing the media, in the end the political problem of the legitimacy of the state remains. It is precisely this problem which the information management of the NIO attempts to obscure. In as much as it is a diversion from the question of legitimacy the strategy of containment is itself a major obstacle to peace in Ireland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTES

1 These findings are based on over fifty interviews and conversations with, first, former and serving civil servants and information officers in the Northern Ireland Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Central Office of Information (COI) and Ministry of Defence and, second, journalists from media outlets in Belfast, Dublin, London and internationally. I have also drawn on newspaper cuttings and other documents including publicity material and press releases issued by the NIO, COI and the FCO.

2 This chapter is part of ongoing work on the production and content of media messages on Ireland and their impact on audience beliefs. I am focusing on questions of source strategy and tactics in this chapter partly for reasons of space. Questions of techniques, the range of activities of the NIO and of source power will be addressed elsewhere. The question of the relative power of sources and media is often posed in terms of the ability of certain views to dominate the media. But this is only part of the equation. The struggle over the reproduction of powerful ideas also depends partly on audience belief. Consequently the research also examines the role of the media in the formation of public knowledge in an attempt to recentre the 'Macro structures of Media and Society' which have been displaced by an 'increasing emphasis on the micro-processes of viewing relations' (Corner 1991: 269). This work develops recent methodological advances outlined elsewhere in this volume by Philo and Kitzinger (Chapters 10 and 11), see also Miller (forthcoming).

3 Details of expenditure in 1989–90 is as follows:

NIO	
'Press, PR and advertising'	£12,276,545
Industrial Development Board	
'Promotional expenses'	£5,234,000
Northern Ireland Tourist Board	
'Press and public relations'	£976,181
Total spending	£18,486,726

Adding the spending of the IDB and tourist board to the press and PR spending of the Department of Economic Development (DED) (£3,477,000), the department concerned both with running IDB and countering the MacBride principles campaign in the United States gives a total of £9,687,181 which is over half the total of NIO spending. Obviously we should be cautious about these figures because those given for advertising by NIO are not broken down by department, nor is there any indication of the use to which other funds are put. Additionally the only data available on the RUC, recently released in a parliamentary answer, is not comparable. The RUC press office was merged with its command centre in 1982 to create the Force Control and Information Centre (FCIC) and figures given do not indicate the amount of expenditure specifically on press and PR work. The figures given are an estimate for the whole of FCIC and cover the whole year of 1989 rather than the financial year 1989–90. The figure for advertising is given for the financial year:

Royal Ulster Constabulary	
Force Control and Information Centre	£2,380,000
Advertising	£22,000

(Sources: *Hansard* 2 April 1990, col. 451–2; Industrial Development Board,

Northern Ireland 1990: 93; Northern Ireland Tourist Board 1990: 21; *Hansard* 9 December 1991, col. 454–5).

4 Publicity broadsheets were a favoured form of communication with journalists and others in the 1970s. During the time of the H-Block crisis a large number of glossy booklets and fact-sheets were issued (see NIO 1980a, 1980b, 1981a, 1981b, 1981c, 1981d), but more recently less of such material has emerged (see NIO 1985a, 1985b). What has been published has mainly followed a theme of normalization in playing down violence and emphasizing the 'nicer' side of Northern Ireland (NIIS n.d.; NIIS/Arts Council of Northern Ireland 1985; NIO 1989). Much 'grey' propaganda in the form of unattributable briefing papers is also issued, mainly produced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (see, for example, FCO 1981, 1983, 1984, 1986a, 1988b).

5 Thanks to Mike Tomlinson for this observation.

6 Thus a January 1988 briefing document, 'The Provisional IRA: international contacts outside the United States', from the information department of the FCO includes information about support groups in, for example, the Netherlands. Some of this information was then reproduced by counter-insurgency journalist Christopher Dobson (see *Irish Independent*, 2 May 1988; *Daily Telegraph* 3 May 1988; cf. Dobson and Payne 1982). Much of the information was inaccurate and the Foreign Office was forced to withdraw some of it. British author Liz Curtis was among those named in the document (see Curtis 1984). Although inaccurate information about her was withdrawn, the Foreign Office refused to remove her name from the briefing, thus smearing her as an 'international contact' of the IRA (*Guardian*, 11 May 1988; *New Statesman and Society*, 1 July 1988).

7 This phrase is an inversion the Irish republican slogan 'Tiocfaidh ar la!', which translates as 'Our day will come!'.

8 An updated version of *Northern Ireland Chronicle* was made after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 and is still in the catalogue of the London Television Service at the COI which produces films for the FCO to distribute overseas.

9 In a recent example of this tactic pictures were used. Two pictures (one before and one after) of a man whose face was disfigured by serious burns after his bomb exploded prematurely were used as 'a visual epitaph to the wickedness of terrorism' (NIO 1989: 27). The man concerned commented 'I have served my prison sentence and I don't need to be reminded of this' and related that because of his injuries he had been the victim of British army harassment. According to the *Sunday World*: 'He received a newspaper photograph of Falklands veteran Simon Winchester, who was also badly burned, with the words "Toastie – The Boys are Back in Town" cut out of newsprint written below it' (6 August 1989).

10 This briefing document which is ostensibly anonymously produced was among others circulated to selected journalists. Pages 119–24 of Barzilay's *British Army in Ulster*, vol. 1 (1973) are lifted almost verbatim from the IRD produced document, sometimes with only spelling mistakes or typographical errors to distinguish it from the original (see also *Time Out*, 14–20 October 1977 – thanks to Duncan Campbell for pointing out these passages). IRD subsequently became the Overseas Information Department and then the Information Department. The present day Information Department still produces 'grey' propaganda material similar to that produced by IRD. See Bloch and Fitzgerald 1983; Dorril and Ramsay 1990; Fletcher 1982; Smith 1979 for material on IRD.

11 Although not all of the victims were actually killed or injured by the IRA. A

photo of the bombing of McGurks bar was included. McGurks was bombed by a loyalist group, but was blamed on the IRA by the army and police (see Curtis 1984: 91–2 for a full account). *The Terror and the Tears* is introduced with photographs of two very young children, one catholic, the other protestant, who are described as 'only two of the tragic victims of the indiscriminate terrorism of the IRA. Altogether 252 people have died. Hundreds more have been injured, some of them seriously'. There is no mention of deaths caused by either loyalist groups or by the army/RUC, although these accounted for a significant portion of the 252 dead. The message is plain – any violence is the work of the IRA. The army only responds to the situation.

12 The 80,000 remaining copies were kept in stock until 19 June when David Howell announced in the House of Commons, in response to repeated questioning from unionist Jim Kilfedder, that copies were available on request. Between then and 3 July 15,000 copies were distributed apparently following requests. See *Hansard* 9 May 1972, col. 352, 7 June 1972, col. 109, 19 June 1972, col. 38–9, 3 July 1972, col. 43, 5 July 1972, col. 179–80, 11 July 1972, col. 324, 24 July 1972, col. 233, 31 July 1972, col. 33, 9 August 1972, col. 495, 26 October 1972, col. 378, 19 December 1972, col. 352–3 for details of the saga.

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