Dublin Castle and the Anglo-Irish War

Dublin Castle and the Anglo-Irish War: Counter Insurgency and Conflict

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the author of this academic work, I feel that it is important to deal with a number of issues which the reader may question when later reading this paper. First and foremost this work is incomplete; it is not as complete as the author should like it to be. To elaborate further the scope of this thesis is limited and focuses overly on one aspect, the chapter on the British Army, and I feel that is its most serious flaw. Although the British Army chapter is the most important, effectively describing how the most potent fighting force on the planet was neutralized from within, it is still just one of the chapters in what became a larger work. it was necessary to reduce the scope of this work to three largish chapters in order to properly deal with the chosen subject matter thematically.

The concept of chapters averaging six thousand words or so, while practical in this academic instance, might not be comfortable for the average reader; I as the author apologise to those who feel that this is the case. The lack of attention to the situation as regards bitter counter-insurgency (or even the nature of the insurgency itself) in Ulster and the lack of a chapter dedicated to the sacrifice made by the brave souls of the Dublin Metropolitan Police Force (unarmed throughout the conflict) and the fate that befell their G-Division colleagues is a black mark against this work. However due to the imposition of a strict word count and a limited time frame, it was neither realistic nor potentially possible to address these issues as comprehensively as I would have liked to have done.

In this work I have endeavoured to demonstrate to the reader the complexity of the multiple factors constricting and dictating the response by the British government of the day and the consequent actions implemented by their organs (the newly bolstered RIC and the weakened British Army), one cannot yet help feeling that this thesis still lacks the unbiased view that is necessary to distinguish it as being worthy of academic credit. I undertook this work as a result of a series of discussions with Professor Anthony McElligott, the MA Course Head, University of Limerick. Prof. McElligott counselled me that my outlook on history might be considered by some as being potentially biased given my use of language and tone. Therefore I chose this area of research, largely

neglected by the more populist writers in an attempt to bridge that gap. I believe that this work is as free as can be from political bias. I am personally of an Irish Nationalist outlook and would define my political views as being those of a political moderate. Conscious of such biased motivation, I endeavoured to write this thesis from a British point of view as much as possible; in fact I would go as far as to say inherent personal bias has shifted somewhat as it probably does as slight disservice to the government of David Lloyd George, whilst bolstering the characters of the Royal Irish Constabulary and the British Army.

My thanks also go to Dr. Catherine Lawless, the other MA Course Director for her tireless efforts on my behalf as regards helping with potential sources and travel information in London for my research trips.

I would especially like to express my sincere thank to my long suffering supervisor, Dr. Ruan O'Donnell. Ruan as Head of the History Department in the University of Limerick, has had more than enough on his plate over the past number of years and he has nonetheless accepted my thesis as the second piece of formal academic work which I have submitted under his aegis. Beir bua agus beannacht!

I would also like to thank my parents, Maura and Eamonn without whose generosity, both monetary and of spirit, I would not have been able to undertake this project.

To my friends John, Kevin and Nicola, without whom the stress of this year would surely have taken a far heavier toll on me than I would care to admit, I thank you all. Without your guidance, help, perseverance, goodwill and support I would never have been able to complete this thesis. You are all true friends and I know that you will go on from here to do great things.

To Aoife. Thank you for all your help and encouragement in this project.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When one sets out to examine the British policies which were aimed toward countering the insurgency in Ireland which had developed in the first quarter of the twentieth century, one must first consider some initial questions regarding the subject matter. These questions, perhaps filters would be a more appropriate term, have great bearing on the subject. What nature did the insurgency assume (and by natural extension the insurgents) and of what nature was the response by Dublin and London to this insurgency? What state was the British Exchequer in at the end of the bloodiest war since 1648? What was the extent of the new British Empire and what was the condition of her forces? In this book I set forth to provide to the reader answers to the aforementioned questions and hopefully provide some clarity to an often over-simplified subject.

As historians, there is a professional imperative upon us to ask difficult questions in the pursuit of our work. We must face the truths that we would rather avoid. Without this tough stance being taken, the pursuit of historical fact (and the subsequent analysis of that fact) is prone to the oversimplification of accepted popular views. The fact in this case can be an oversimplification which can be traced to the idea that there were two sides to the insurgency; that it was simply the Irish versus the British (or more often the English). Another aspect of the oversimplification of Irish revolutionary history is the common misconception that is often portrayed by the Republican movement, is the popular image that it was the heinous British that inflicted such horrendous atrocities on *us*, the Irish. That image, whilst popular, is nonetheless fundamentally flawed. It fails to address the fact during the period of the War of Independence (1919-1921), Ireland was as much a part of the United Kingdom as was Scotland or Wales; Dublin was considered by many to be the second city of the British Isles.

How then can one reconcile the fact that an Ireland which sought to be free was also an Ireland that was integral to the United Kingdom of the early

twentieth century? Logically there cannot be two Irelands which existed at the same time in the same place and yet were so fundamentally different from each other that they could almost have been from different planets. Logically again, one must deduce that one vision of Ireland must not be wholly accurate in its portrayal of the country, the nations of peoples and the inter-communal relationships that existed.

This book aims to examine the relationships, imagery and popular perceptions of counter-insurgency experiences in Ireland during the Irish War of Independence. It will probe the elements of the various forces which engaged in counter-insurgency operations in Ireland during the period in question, seeking to expand on traditional views and confront some preconceived theories surrounding them. It will also challenge the theory that the conflict was one of a primarily 'might versus right' and provide a greater depth of analysis of all belligerents involved in hostilities. It is hoped that through an examination of the relationships that existed between the belligerent forces (and in some cases between allies) taking part in the war, light will be shed on the complex network of moralities, allegiances and operational abilities that were operating in Ireland during the conflict. By extension it will examine the often conflicting nature of the relationship between the tripartite members of the security apparatus in British administered Ireland, namely the 'police' (RIC and DMP), their paramilitary reinforcements (Black and Tans and Auxiliaries) and the Army.

As the title suggests, the purpose of this chapter is to outline to the reader the state of the country, with special reference to the province of Munster, prior to the outbreak of widespread hostilities during the Anglo-Irish War, popularly known in this country as the War of Independence. Although both terms describe a common event, they are not actually mutually exclusive and actually represent a sharply divergent set of views with regard to the hostilities that occurred between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and those forces being maintained and paid for by the British Government in the early twentieth century. Whilst the term 'War of Independence' can be viewed as being synonymous with Republican bias and rife with Nationalistic tendencies, it should also be treated with respect; the hostilities entered into by the Irish Volunteers (IV; later the IRA) were, for all intensive purposes, true warfare. The IRA had taken an oath to fight for the establishment and protect the Irish Republic; men had died for 'the cause' as it had become known and as such it deserves a measure of respect. However the alternate point of view must also be

respected. Some regard the war as being the first truly Anglo-Irish War and term it accordingly. Others still do not regard it as a war at all

This work aims to examine and debunk the myths surrounding the conflict and in doing so aims to demonstrate to the reader that the War of Independence was not so much won by the Irish as lost by the British. Furthermore it aims to show that this loss was not inevitable and that although the main action occurred between 1916-1921, the seeds of destruction were sown far earlier than that.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DUBLIN AND LONDON: *QUIS CUSTODIET IPSOS CUSTODES*?[1]

The history of the relationship between the British government and the administration which it sponsored in Ireland is a long and complex one. This chapter will primarily focus on that relationship during the period 1919 to 1921; the reasoning being that this period is generally agreed to more or less accurately encompass the main actions of the Anglo-Irish War, more popularly known in Ireland as the War of Independence. By selecting this period to study, this scholarly work sets forth to examine the role played in Irish affairs by both the British government and its quasi-independent (at times) administration in Ireland. It will also observe the increasingly complex nature of the relationship between the administrations as the conflict progressed. To do this it will study the roles of the Lord Lieutenant, the Chief Secretary and the Civil Service probing not only their involvement in the day-to-day administration, but also degree to which they provided key strategic long-term planning for Ireland. This chapter and the subsequent, dealing with the Royal Irish Constabulary, will demonstrate how a lack of foresight, prudence in decision making and a general failure to see the bigger picture over time contributed to the fact that as hostilities progressed the force was prematurely unable to contain the threat posed by militant separatism. Theoretically the 'old' Constabulary, as a paramilitary force with excellent local intelligence, should not have been defeated and effectively sidelined as early in the conflict as they were. The reason for their extremely precipitous capitulation cannot merely be the military prowess of an untested (and under-resourced) guerrilla army, such as the Irish Volunteers/Republican Army were at that point in the conflict.

[1] '*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes'*, who shall watch the watchers?

It will also attempt to show the effects of such an endemic *ad hoc* nature of security planning on the security and law enforcement situation in the country. In doing this it will demonstrate how the *laissez faire* attitude of the Dublin Castle administration unfortunately complemented the poor decision making and planning aspects of their relationship with London. It will demonstrate how the position of Lord Lieutenant became largely ceremonial in the years after the Act of Union superseded in import by the Chief Secretary. It will show how this office in turn attained the connotation of being a poisoned chalice, usually passed around the government in a game of political football and 'awarded' to a junior member. The posting, although guaranteed a seat at the cabinet table, was rarely sought out and the quality of the office holders was sufficient in times of order and rarely exceptional in times of crisis.

Although the British administration in Ireland, traditionally based in Dublin Castle (henceforth referred to as the Castle administration or simply the Castle), can trace its lineage back to the time of the Norman conquest of the country, for the sake of historical expediency we will deal primarily with a period beginning from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards. By the late eighteenth century it had grown both in scale and structure; after surviving the failed rebellions of the United Irishmen in 1798 and Robert Emmet in 1803, it began to operate in a quasi-independent manner which it managed to continue into the post Unification era. Ironically it was after the final unification of all the lands of Great Britain under a single parliament in London that the Castle administration became more firmly established in Ireland and entrenched in Irish society than it had ever been before. Legislation contained in the Act and subsequent acts also passed by the Houses of Parliament paved the way for the furthest yet assimilation of the rule of London into Irish political and social life. This assimilation was brought about by Dublin through its provision of law and order for the troubled island of Ireland; the initial law enforcement agency, the Peace Preservation Force, was established by Sir Robert Peel in 1814.[2] Peel reasoned that if Ireland could be brought to adhere to the laws and ordinances of mainland Britain then peace and the move to order would follow shortly.[3]

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[2] Brian Jenkins, *Irish Nationalism and the British State, From Repeal to Revolutionary Nationalism*, (London, 2006), p. 21.

[3] Robert Black, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, (London, 1970), p. 49.

Within a decade the force had been assimilated into the County Constables, a law enforcement entity which was organised on a provincial and county basis rather than a national one.[4] The reasoning behind this move was that a more comprehensive approach to the problem of Irish law enforcement was needed, if anarchy was to be banished. As a consequence, this force was later itself amalgamated into the Irish Constabulary, which in turn became known as the Royal Irish Constabulary.[5]

By examining the reform of and special attentions being paid to the constabulary in Ireland, one can deduce that in the nineteenth century the decision was made by the British government that 'special' crime in Ireland, especially militant separatism, should be the domain of the police rather than involving the armed forces in its suppression. However the British government acknowledged the fact that Ireland was a distinct entity, separate in its attitude towards law and order, from mainland Britain and that this separation required a specialist approach that would not be found elsewhere in Britain.[6] For instance in the aftermath of the Clerkenwell attack by the Fenians, HM Queen Victoria urged Lord Derby (Prime Minister) to suspend the writ of *Habeas Corpus* in an attempt to capture the rebels.[7] Despite his Queen's wishes, Derby ensured that the British liberal tradition would continue, instead convincing her that increasing the Metropolitan Police Force would prove to be a better move.[8]

Britain, and especially England, often laid claim to their proud tradition of liberalism. This liberal moral compass played a role in the inability of the British administration being able to effectively counter and eliminate the threat posed by militant nationalism and separatism in Ireland; their misplaced morality prevented the British government from utilizing their most potent asset in the execution of their duty, the British Army. It was perceived that there was an over-reliance by the British government on using the Army to suppress rebellion in Ireland and furthermore that it

[4] Stanley Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland*, (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 243-4.
[5] Peter Cottrell, *The Anglo-Irish War, The Troubles of 1913-1922*, (Oxford, 2006), p. 12.
[6] Black, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, p. 51.
[7] Sir John Moylan, *Scotland Yard and the Metropolitan Police*, (London, 1929), p. 183.
[8] *Ibid.*

portrayed weaknesses on the part of the state, being unable to govern effectively through civil means.[9] Nevertheless the idealist view of liberalism was often conveniently diluted or placed on hiatus whenever successive British governments found it inconvenient to adhere to its more stringent conditions, e.g. the genocidal final British response to the Boer *Kommandoes* during the Second Anglo-Boer War.[10] To say that the British liberal tradition prevented the government from bring the most appropriate resources to bear to counter the threat posed by Irish separatism is a flawed hypothesis.

To casual British observers it was readily apparent that there was always something wrong with Ireland, that it was a troubled and blighted nation of people, who were unable or unwilling to comport themselves in a British manner. Certainly that image was one which was cultivated by several British politicians in order to conceal the growing need for agricultural, social and national reform. The policies of successive British Governments were at best ineffective in Ireland; at worst they were harmful to the economy and the people. The Act of Union had promised a greater 'domestic' export market for Irish produce and services to mainland Britain. However this did not materialize due partly to British mercantile protectionism and partly to the inability of British politicians to allow the Irish profit at the expense of British farmers.

The Irish Famine can be cited as being an incident of harmful, negligent oversight by the ruling authority, the British government. The perceived inactivity of the British government during this terrible period of Irish history drew the wrath of Irish nationalists who revolted during the Young Irelander rebellion of 1848. During the famine years in Ireland, with thousands dying each month and tens of thousands at great risk of starvation and disease, the British liberal tradition allowed the landlords of the country to continue to export foodstuffs, charge rack rents and evict tenants unable to pay those rents, at will. The inability and unwillingness of the British state to take effective remedial action to stem the initial problems ensured that the difficulties caused by the failure of the potato crop descended into secondary chaos and the anarchy which accompanied it. The inability of a British government to admit to incurring a problem of such initial magnitude while they were in power can be seen as a recurring feature of Anglo-Irish history. An example of this inaction would be David

[9] Jenkins, *Irish Nationalism and the British State*, p. 21.
[10] Jenkins, *Irish Nationalism and the British State*, p.101.

Lloyd George's decision to reinforce the RIC with demobilized British soldiers rather than employ the Army proper to deal with the rebels can be viewed as a failure to properly engage with the issue and admit that there was a serious problem.

The decades ending the nineteenth century and beginning the twentieth were quiet by Irish standards. After the years of wastage and want during the mid-century famines and the attempted and failed rebellions of 1848 and 1867, the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Castle administration were given a degree of autonomy in their dealings with Ireland. This included the manner in which the Irish people would be policed. Due to the near total degree of destruction which the Irish Constabulary visited on the Fenians in 1867 and the subsequent rout of Irish nationalist forces, the Castle administration determined that the threat from radical Irish separatism had been severely diminished. The Land War (1889-1892) and the destabilizing anti-social effects which accompanied it provided the template for Irish counter-insurgency policing for the next generation; the British administration adhered strictly to the principle of being well equipped for the last war you faced. During the Land War, the RIC engaged in few heavily armed conventional engagements with the Irish peasantry. Instead practically the only occasions which they had cause to handle weapons was their daily morning parade with rifles/carbines, when providing a guard on a fixed location (courthouses, private/official residences, protection posts, etc.) or when accompanying Land Agents carrying out evictions or guarding other VIPs.

Once the threats posed by the Land War had passed, the decision was taken by the constabulary hierarchy and the Castle leadership that there no longer sufficient need for the RIC to carry long/short rifles on a regular basis; Constables were ordered to dump heavy arms in their barracks armoury and patrol only with their side-arms (RIC Webley Revolver) and truncheons. In the aftermath of the War, the increased gulf which had developed between the police and the policed became readily apparent. The perceived level of aloofness and alienation from the local populace, it was reasoned, ensured that the RIC was not privy to details of local life and were thus unable to prevent or prosecute the crimes which were committed in their district as effectively as they could in theory.

The decision to position the RIC in closer social proximity to the citizenry of Ireland was to reap benefits for the Castle; it was also inadvertently be the cause of their downfall and eventual ruin. Whilst the RIC became a

perfect example to other police forces around the world (inspiring the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the territorial police forces in Australia and other crown colonies), in all aspects of 'low intensity' or 'community policing', they were in fact effectively dumbing down the physical paramilitary skills of the force which had been hard learned for over a generation. Training in musketry, arms drill and elementary tactics all but ceased when recruits graduated and left the RIC training depot in the Phoenix Park in Dublin. The lack of effective postgraduate continuous training in musketry and the other aforementioned defensive disciplines ensured that when, between 1919 and 1921, they were confronted with determined, armed and co-ordinated opponents they were unable to counter the threat posed. This change in policies by the leadership of the RIC is one of the primary causes as to why the RIC were unable to effectively defend themselves and can be highlighted as one of the reasons why the RIC essentially disintegrated as an armed police force when confronted with a credible threat.

The stagnation in training for the RIC (in much the same manner as for the Army during peacetime, e.g. post Boer War) was complimented unfortunately by other self-destructive factors. Inflation in Ireland had begun to rise during the economic uncertainty of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; this can be attributed to a number of recurring factors which dominate Irish fiscal life during the period. Pre-Industrial Revolution economic life in Britain was still heavily tied to and dependent on agriculture. Nowhere was this statement truer than in Ireland; excluding the major population centres (Dublin, Belfast, Cork, etc.) and the region of the Lagan Valley in Ulster, agriculture was the primary occupation of the majority of the population.[11] In normal times the connection of the fiscal fortunes of a country to a relatively stable sector of their economy was a relatively normal and not dangerous occurrence; economic growth would be slow, but steady. However Irish farming was both subsistence (potato) and export (cereals and livestock). And while there was a strong export market for Irish produced foodstuffs, the majority of Irish tenant farmers were forced to survive on the potato crop.

When the potato crop began to suffer from Blight and fail in the mid 1840's, a large-scale famine struck the country. Those closest to the

[11] James H. Johnson, 'The Context of Migration: The Example of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century', in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* (Vol. 15, No. 3, 1990), pp. 259-276.

poverty line were worst affected by the shortfall in their basic foodstuffs; however the Famine and the concomitant massive socio-economic upheaval that followed affected all aspects of Irish society. Inflation rose nearly every year in Ireland (the rate did slow somewhat during the relative calm in the aftermath of the Land War). In 1847 the cost of living index for rural Ireland was six-hundred and twenty-five; by the turn of the century it had fallen to three-hundred, but it rose every year after that, without fail, until the declaration of the Truce in 1921.[12]

Table1.1: Cost of Living Index for Urban and Rural Ireland, 1867-1921.[13]

Year	Urban	Rural
1867	384	419
1875	357	427
1890	278	333
1900	264	300
1914	304	382
1916	439	543
1918	613	723
1919	693	888
1920	847	979
1921	611	864

The cumulative effects of such increases began to seriously undermine the efforts of ordinary workers attempting to keep pace with it. The RIC was not immune to such inflatory depredations and rank and file constables suffered an erosion of their standard rate of pay through until the Truce was declared. The RIC sought pay rises from the Castle during this period in an effort to offset this inflatory trend, however the necessary increases were seldom forthcoming. The initial rate of pay for constables was so low during the 1860's and 1870's that it was (coupled with the unreasonably strict nature of barrack life) one of the primary reasons for the resignation

[12] N.C. Fleming and Alan O'Day, 'Cost of Living Indices', in 'the Longman Handbook of Modern Irish History Since 1800', (Harlow, 2005), pp. 569-571.
[13] *Ibid.*

of many young constables from the force, often in order to better their position.[14] This trend was later to return to haunt the force.

Periodically the Castle saw fit to grant piecemeal increases to the Constabulary, however these were seldom able to do more than barely retain parity with the rising cost of inflation. The Royal Irish Constabulary had done their job and had enforced the King's Law in a troubled land and had brought about the elusive transition to law and order that London had sought before there was a unified Britain. With their Herculean task completed, the RIC was regarded as a throwback to Ireland's darker past; an armed police force in a Union of states which shunned such a very coercive and Orwellian concept. They were treated in a similar manner by successive Castle administrations, which were quick to reap the benefits of peace, but were not interested in taking steps to ensure that such peaceful conditions would continue. However it should be remembered that the Castle and the Chief Secretary were British civil servants and as such they also were subject to the whims of the Exchequer in Whitehall.

Furthermore, the British Exchequer in turn was subject to the will of the Cabinet and it was there that all major policy decisions concerning Ireland were (in conjunction with the civil service in Whitehall and the joint Houses of Parliament) formulated, debated and decided. To lay total blame for the degradation in abilities of the Royal Irish Constabulary wholly at the feet of the civil servants in Dublin Castle and the short termed Chief Secretaries would be unfair; Dublin merely implemented policies which were formulated in London. Dublin did however pass along information to London which shaped those policies and it is in this area that responsibility might best be apportioned. The Castle Administration was an extension of the civil service which operated from Whitehall and like their colleagues in London, they too went normally and unquestioningly about their work.

When it came to Ireland, British politics (and by extension, 'Irish' policies), were neither simple nor straightforward. So many considerations had to be entered into that the complexity of even the most simple situation beggared belief; approval for policies had to generated/gauged at department, ministerial and cabinet levels. It had to be skilfully defended in the Commons and then in the Lords, where it would usually be

[14] John D. Brewer , 'Max Weber and the Royal Irish Constabulary: A Note on Class and Status', in *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Mar., 1989), pp. 82-96.

viciously attacked by the opposition, often purely due to its origin from the government benches. Proposers of policies then had to receive financial assurances from the Exchequer as to whether or not there would actually be sufficient funds available to implement its provisions. We shall see in later chapters how the Exchequer rose to be able to exert disproportionate control at cabinet level over other departments in the aftermath of the massive financial commitment undertaken during the First World War.

British cabinets in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a mixture of Conservative and Liberal traditions. These two parties each delivered an eclectic mix of policies on Ireland aimed at solving the Irish question, the perennial thorn in the side of the British political establishment. What neither side was willing to admit was that nothing less than the integrity of the Union was at stake; the security of Ireland was being compromised due to the deliberate state policies aimed at weakening the ability of the Royal Irish Constabulary to fight militant separatism should it rear its head once more. Governments of the late nineteenth century ensured that the position of the Chief Secretary of Ireland was to be appointed from central government and was to have the power of a full cabinet minister.[15] This implies that London had decided that it was taking on primary responsibility for Irish affairs from the Irish; in bringing Ireland in from the periphery in theory London hoped that Ireland would find harmony in being an official component of the Union and also of the larger Empire. However British inability to treat the native Irish (distinct from the Anglo-Irish) as equals destroyed any hope of a peaceful Union. This required the British to provide an armed coercive police force to enforce British rule, a force which they allowed to lapse into sloth and which wasted away due to the careless attitude.

Ireland was similar in degrees to the other English vassal states of Scotland and Wales. 'British' policy can best demonstrate this difference. British inability to decide a comprehensive security policy for Ireland can be cited as a primary example; the fact that the Irish police were still armed, whereas their mainland counterparts were not can be identified as the prime example in this regard. The shift from high intensity policing to that of a lower intensity in the latter stages of the nineteenth century shows us that Ireland was beginning to move from its traditional historical wilderness to a more British 'civilised' social outlook. However in spite of these changes, the RIC remained an armed coercive force, not following

[15] Oliver Mac Donagh, *Ireland, the Union and its Aftermath* (Dublin, 2003), p. 9.

the example of the Dublin Metropolitan Police (in turn following the example set by the Police Force for the Metropolis of London) and providing an unarmed police service.[16] It is in this basic lack of attention to detail of policy which can be said to have had a major effect on the British administration in Ireland.

If one were to imagine a popular rebellion against British rule occurring in the Rhonda Valley in Wales in the early 1920's, where the police were unarmed during this period, one can draw the following conclusions. Firstly, although the police would have been a perfectly legitimate potential target, there would not have been raids, nor assaults on police patrols for arms as the police did not possess these weapons in the first instance. Secondly, there would not have been a rush to reinforce the police with mercenaries and these reinforcements would not then have been given *carte blanche* in their endeavours to defeat the rebels. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, the primary agents who would deal with the insurgents would have been the Army; an unarmed police force could not possibly have been able to resist an armed determined and coordinated enemy, but it would be capable of providing ancillary civil support to the Army in this endeavour.

Therefore it is possible to determine that the half hearted retention of arms by the RIC and the catastrophic lack of appropriate and continuous training, was a tragic error in judgement on the part of both the British government and their Dublin Castle administration. As time went on British government requirements of the RIC increased disproportionately to the input of resources or the oversight of the conduct of the force. The pre-war governments were constantly preoccupied with matters in theatres other than the Union; a militant Russian Empire threatening the northern borders of India, an expansionist Ottoman Empire in the Middle East hostile to British interests in the Suez Canal, an escalating arms race with a newly unified Germanic super state in Central Europe.[17,18,19,20] These

[16] Richard Abbott, *Police Casualties in Ireland* (Cork, 2000), p. 17.
[17] T.O. Lloyd, *The Short Oxford History of the Modern World; The British Empire, 1558-1995* (2nd Edition, Oxford, 1984), p. 152.
[18] *'The British Empire and the Great War, 1914-1918'*, in *'The Oxford history of the British Empire, Volume IV: The Twentieth Century'*, (Eds.) Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999), pp. 114-137.
[19] Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London, 1995), p. 213.
[20] James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, pp. 335-6.

concerns were exacerbated by the usual demands of garrisoning a large and disparate empire; garrisons had to be provided in Australia, Canada, India, Asia, Australia and large areas of Africa.[21] It was argued that the decrease in profile as a result of reductions in funding and maintenance of the force was not to be considered to be a completely negative outcome. The newly streamlined force would be more cost efficient it was argued, an important aspect for Prime Ministers hard pressed to find money for dreadnoughts and colonial forces as well as outfitting and reforming the aging British Army.

Another aspect which should be noted as important for British administrations in regard to Ireland was public opinion. Although the Empire had a long history of making and adhering to unpopular decisions as regards their imperial policy, in some regards policy had to bow to pressures emanating from outside the home islands. In relation to Ireland, the most important external actor intruding in Britain's sphere of influence was the United States of America. Being Ireland's closest transatlantic neighbour and having a large and expanding economy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, large numbers of destitute Irishmen and women sought refuge from the worst excesses of the Famine in America. As a result of wide-scale, long-term and continuous waves of emigration from Ireland, a large Irish-American community began to steadily grow and prosper on America's East Coast. Cities like New York, Boston and Chicago became synonymous with Ireland and hotbeds of Irish nationalism. Pro-Irish nationalist organisations like the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Fenian influenced Clann na Gael were established by emigrants to retain a link with the land of their birth and also to promote Irish interests both in Ireland and also in the United States; they also served as unofficial groups for the purpose of lobbying American politicians in regard to the position of Home Rule for Ireland.[22]

The British government of David Lloyd George had to tread carefully around the American president of Woodrow Wilson from the beginning of the First World War in 1914. American isolationism was at an all time high and slogans such as 'America First' and 'Americism' were not

[21] J.R.M. Butler, 'Imperial Questions in British politics 1868-1880', in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire: Volume III, The Empire-Commonwealth*, (Eds.) E.A. Benians, J.R.M. Butler, P.N.S. Mansergh, E.A. Walker (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 17-64.

[22] Bernadette Whelan, *United States Foreign Policy and Ireland; From Empire to Independence* (2006), p. 32.

uncommonly heard; Wilson in his re-election campaign had promised to keep America out of what was largely seen as a conflict between European colonial powers, one which largely did not concern Americans. In addition to this there was a substantial degree of political pressure being brought to bear by pro-Irish nationalist groups in America against the political establishment; the advent of the war had reignited anti-English sentiment and coupled with the Irish propaganda, it rapidly became Anglophobic in aspect. Even Irish-American Catholic Bishops began to emerge as rabid Nationalists in the US, encouraging their congregations via polemic sermons directed against the Democratic Party and their president. In an election year, Woodrow Wilson could not allow such a significant segment of traditional Democratic voters to defect to a rival party over a foreign policy issue which was not technically pertinent to the domestic United States. Nor however, could he interfere in the running of a democratically elected regime friendly to the USA and potentially one of her allies against the Axis powers. A compromise was needed by Wilson.

As an academic specialising in Public Administration, Woodrow Wilson readily acknowledged that his strengths lay more at home on the domestic front rather than as a foreign policy hawk; he had remarked to a friend prior to his election that '…it would be the irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs.'[23] His administration sought to minimise the negative effects of their unpopular relationship with Britain at this time on his domestic agenda during the run up to the 1916 presidential election; indeed his domestic policies, which were aimed at regulating working hours for adults and shortening/abolishing them for minors/children, garnered a considerably greater vote for him than any other recent Democratic candidate for the Presidency. Although this was the case as regards domestic policies, foreign relations were another case. Wilsonian doctrine as regards the wider world was America First! Wilson tried to retain Allied biased American neutrality in an attempt to keep the US free from this war. However as the conflict progressed and turned into an inferno of epic proportions the hard pressed Allies were no longer able to accept such half measures as biased neutrality any longer.

The government of David Lloyd George was beset by both domestic and foreign difficulties at this juncture. Britain was involved in a conflict of global proportions, incurring casualties on a scale that had not been seen in Europe since the destruction of the Thirty Years War, almost three

[23] Whelan, *United States Foreign Policy and Ireland*, p. 22.

hundred years prior. The British government could no longer shoulder the strain which the war placed upon the national economy; nor could they afford to lose so many young men of fighting age. Arguments over the need to extend conscription to Ireland threatened to boil over, possibly requiring large number of troops being sent to Ireland in order to enforce the Conscription Act, thus essentially defeating the purpose. Balanced with this was the need by Lloyd George to bring in another powerful supporter to bolster the sagging Allied Nations in their attempt to defeat the Axis Powers led principally by Germany and the Austro-Hungarians. The best case scenario for the Anglo-Franco alliance was American entry into the 'Great War' on their side; the worst case was the Americans retaining their mask of passive neutrality.

Anglo-American relations suffered throughout the path to war; there were a series of attempts by the British to prevent the Americans dealing with the Central powers which resulted in a partial maritime blockade of British shipping (it had been hoped that such action would erode the middle ground and force the US to pick a side).[24]

The addition of the seemingly eternal 'Irish Question' to the arena of international politics during this period was not a welcome one for the British. The American people were skittish enough in regard to the possibility of entering a major war without being presented with evidence of one of their potential allies apparently subjugating the desire for independence of a small nation. It was feared by some in the British government that Americans would draw parallels with the Irish and their shared historical enmity against the British (the American War of Independence, the War of 1812, the Fenians). Lloyd George was forced to continually attempt to reassure the American President that the trouble in Ireland was merely limited to isolated attacks by political dissidents. It was noted by the *New York Times* newspaper, traditionally a pro-Ally periodical, that the belligerent blacklisting of Euro-American trade was '…the most tactless, foolish and unnecessary act of the British Government during the war.'[25] Unfortunately for the beleaguered and embattled British government worse was yet to come.

[24] Thomas A. Bailey, 'The United States and the Blacklist during the Great War' in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Mar., 1934), pp. 14-35.
[25] New York Times, July 20, 1916.

Whilst Lloyd George was able in some fashion to reason away the questionable legality of the boycotting of American merchants.[26] What he could not cover up or gloss over however was the 1916 Easter Rising. In the aftermath of the Rising, Wilson acted on behalf of not only American citizens found guilty of taking part in the fighting, but also tried to get the British to mitigate the severity of their response to the insurrection. Indeed the callous policy of spaced out executions in cold blood, whilst designed to demonstrate the Empire's resolve, instead portrayed to Irish-America and indeed the rest of the world a British government little changed from the days of 'Black '47.

This colossal gaffe on the part of the British authorities forced Lloyd George to consider all future action which was being prepared against the rebels in Ireland most carefully. British military actions in Ireland were no longer subject to universal indifference; the promotion of formal education for minors, the arrival of the telegram and the growth in popularity of newspapers (with a concomitant rise in the voting franchise) ensured that news of the British attempts to quell the Rising soon found their way into transatlantic immigrant homes and public houses. The operation of drumhead courts martial and accompanying executions generated feelings of horror and disgust in such quarters, leading many of the Irish émigrés to question their loyalty to a political party which would allow such policies to be enacted without uttering words of caution and protest.[27] Many Irish-American lobby groups began to petition the Democratic Party and the President in order for him to intercede. If the Rising had taken place in a non-election year, perhaps the result would have been different, but Wilson began to question the policies of His Majesty's government.

Whilst the Irish continued to vote for Wilson in their droves, there was a very definite undercurrent of dissatisfaction being generated in America in the years after the Rising; this began to manifest itself in anti-British propaganda and also more worryingly in the increased collection of funds for the upkeep of revolutionary forces in Ireland. These funds were then used to purchase arms, ammunition and material which were smuggled into the country with varying degrees of success; an example of IRA

[26] Bailey, 'The United States and the Blacklist during the Great War,' pp. 20-21.
[27] Sterling J. Kernek, 'Distractions of Peace during War: The Lloyd George Government's Reactions to Woodrow Wilson, December, 1916-November, 1918' in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, Vol. 65, No. 2 (1975), pp. 1-117.

gunrunning would be the foiled exporting of Thompson Sub-Machine Guns (SMG) from New York Harbour in 1921.[28]

The policy of widespread martial law and the accompanying trial by courts martial were victims of this attempted scale down in British international diplomacy. Without these tried and tested measures any British counter-insurgency in Ireland would lack effective teeth; any group of murderers could sow fear and hatred amongst the populace, but unless the guerrillas were removed from the equation, the insurgency would continue unabated. The choices facing the British were stark; on the one hand they needed the help of an unwilling ally in the form of the United States to come on board and enable them to defeat the Central Powers. Without them or a reversal of fortunes of miraculous proportions then the Allied Powers would be forced to sue for peace. They simply could not hold the equally desperate Central Powers any longer. On the other hand, if the British were to sacrifice hugely effective measures such as the increased use of the military and the proclamation of widespread Martial Law, then without a radical change in strategy and/or policy they could not hope to restore order to Ireland and effectively counter the threat from insurgents. In short to win one war, the British accepted virtual defeat in another.

In the aftermath of the War, Wilson seemed to roll back on his promises and high ideals of the right to self-determination for small nations. Irish envoys to the Versailles negotiations and to America and Washington itself were often left unmet. The British felt reasonably more secure in their dealings with American involvement in Irish affairs in the aftermath of the War; they were no longer dependent on American entry into the conflict on their side and they were beginning to reacquire a measure of their independence in the provision of munitions and other supplies. The British Foreign office felt secure in themselves to such and extent that they issued an ultimatum to an Editor of the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*; they stated that unless he refrain from printing Sinn Féin calls for a boycott of British goods, then British firms *might* decide to treat the periodical in a likewise manner as regards advertising.[29] In the aftermath of the war and the immediate threat to American lives in Ireland, Wilson began to lose interest in Ireland and Irish affairs. His electoral victory in 1916, especially his popularity amongst Irish-American Democratic voters on domestic policy issues, told him that while he could not afford to ignore

[28] New York Times, June 20th, 1922.
[29] British Embassy to the Foreign Office, London. 5th July 1921, FO 371/5633.

the Irish question as regards the traditional Irish-American support for the Democratic Party, he could leave it aside to cool as long as the British did not reinvent 1916. The deliberate policy of not meeting with either DeValera or any of the other members of the Irish delegations in either the continental United States or Versailles can be viewed as Wilson attempting to (at least temporarily) wash his hands of the Irish question. This recalcitrant (especially when contrasted with Wilson's avowed aims of self determination) policy should have been noted by Britain as a tacit sanction by their wartime ally of their behaviour in their troubled province.

The Rising changed little with regard to Britain's relationship with its administration in Ireland. No sweeping changes in administration practices were made, no vast re-armament and re-training programmes were embarked upon for the RIC; it should be noted that the RIC did not play the most active role in the suppression of the Easter rebels, instead ceding authority to the Army as it was realised that only the British Armed Forces possessed both the wherewithal in terms of firepower and the training to utterly defeat the rebels. This fact was clearly and painfully lost on the British government in the aftermath of the Rising. The only immediate positive effect which the attempted coup d'état had on the RIC was that constables were ordered to remain armed at all times, even when in barracks and to always patrol armed.[30] This was to be used should barracks come under attack, mirroring the Fenian attempts in 1867 and foreshadowing the later attacks by the IRA. This increase was laughable when compared with the ferocity of the onslaught which came next; constables regularly retreated to strong redoubts within the barracks when it came under attack, rather than engage the determined guerrillas with this limited supply.

One of the chief areas for criticism and complaint would be the fact that the political leadership of the United Kingdom was out of touch with the actual situation on the ground; it was this lack of accurate information that resulted in the planning for the Rising going largely undetected. Furthermore, this continued lack of information contributed to the failures of all attempts at containing the problem of militant separatism at the local level before it had a chance to organise itself in the aftermath of the post-Rising and German Plot mass arrests. Once this chance had passed the joint Irish and British administrations by, there was still a small chance that the authorities would have been able to arrest the leadership of the

[30] Jim Herlihy, *The Royal Irish Constabulary, 1822-1922* (Dublin, 1997), p. 272.

rebels and allow the nascent organisation to falter and fail of its own accord without too much effort from the coercive elements of the state. Due to a combination of a lack of accurate and up-to-date intelligence coming from the Royal Irish Constabulary and a lack of willingness to present a plan to their underlings, the government also allowed this chance to slip through its fingers. If the policy of executing the leaders of the Easter Rising was the biggest mistake that London ever made in relation to Ireland, then not taking commensurate remedial action against all identifiable rebels at the first sign of intelligence suggesting that an organised threat was beginning to emerge, was surely their second biggest.

The failures in the relationship between the administrations of Ireland and their government in London, is what allowed the Anglo-Irish War to become known as the Irish War of Independence. To say that there was a breakdown in communication between Dublin and London is a gross understatement. The very fact that any measure of negotiated truce followed by independence, tempered as it was, granted unto a group of organised rebels by the British Empire speaks volumes regarding the failures of the British administrations in both London and Dublin. The Irish did not win the war on their own; the British also lost theirs. Not since the American War of Independence had the British suffered such a disastrous military defeat. Yet how can one count the Truce as a victory for the Irish? The guerrilla has to do nothing but exist and survive in order to win; the very fact that the British government failed to press an IRA which was short on ammunition, weapons and allegedly running out of free ground in which to operate, suggests that they were unable to do so. If one cannot defeat one's enemy then one, by an extension of that logic, has lost.

Lloyd George's need to maintain an extremely cordial and slightly deferential relationship with Wilson largely became defunct with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles; the Americans had entered the war, fought on the Allied side and had brought about the 'peace' at Versailles. Britain could now conduct her affairs in Ireland and settle the 'question' on her own terms; to say that after 1919, that Britain was forced to lessen the severity of its response towards Irish separatism, due to American pressures, is largely unfounded. True there was some pressure exerted, but very little official pressure. Therefore what else caused the British government to fail to respond to the domestic threat posed by private political armies within the United Kingdom itself at a time when they were concerned with the threat posed from similar groups around the world?

The answer can be found in the economic situation in which Britain found itself in the aftermath of a war of attrition resulting in the near total destruction of the traditional enlisted and NCO fighting core of the British Army the First World War. The cost which the Treasury was forced to shoulder for such a long and arduous series of campaigns to defeat the Central Powers also played a significant part in the early post-war period in the United Kingdom; even prior to the outbreak of hostilities, a harmfully parsimonious attitude existed in Treasury and governmental financial management circles with regard to Ireland. The lack of cabinet harmony ensured that neither an effective nor measured response would be forthcoming anytime during the life of that government; this situation parallels the situation in which the Dublin Castle administration found itself in when confronted with a disastrous succession of inept, uncaring and divisive senior civil servants and political leaders. Without proper bipartisan leadership being shown, a true impact could not be made upon the complex networks of problems which beset the Union at this juncture in its history.