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## Policing, Terrorism and the Conundrum of 'Community': A Northern Ireland Perspective

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### Introduction

On an international scale, Northern Ireland has enjoyed a relatively 'elevated' position in terms of the political, economic and not least research attention which has been devoted to the resolution of what has been a protracted, internecine armed conflict lasting nearly four decades. With global 'lessons' relating to the successes (or otherwise) of the country's transition from conflict to relative peace, on a number of political and policing plains, this shift has been presented as a model to behold for other societies ravaged with internal division and strife (Campbell *et al.*, 2003; Ellison and O'Reilly, 2008). Most prominently, the reforms to policing in the country have both been central to, and have tended to act as a catalyst for, wider political progress in the country, which have most recently included all-party political support for the policing institutions, along with devolved policing and justice powers for the Northern Ireland Executive for the first time since 1972 (Ryder, 1997; O'Rawe, 2003; Mulcahy, 2006; Topping, 2008a).

However, beyond this largely positive, broad-brush picture relating to the politics of the peace process, it would appear that little academic attention has been paid to the contemporary parameters of *policing* the peace by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) – especially in terms of their ability to balance the delivery of a more 'normalized', community-oriented service in the face of a substantial and continuing terrorist threat from (mainly) dissident Republican factions (Frampton, 2010; Topping and Byrne, 2012). Indeed, the rather disparate, empirical 'state' of this community and

counter-terrorism policing narrative has been captured by Ellison and Mulcahy (2001: 244–5), who note that:

Northern Ireland has until relatively recently existed in a kind of criminological netherworld ... its *raison d'être* seemed to be to provide a plethora of 'terrorism' and counter-insurgency 'experts' with the raw material to feed their often fanciful imagination ... a pre-Enlightenment void where the rules of the criminological game, as they were considered in Britain, did not apply.

Added to this, through the haze of what Bayley has termed 'Northern Ireland fatigue' (2007), international interest in the country's policing and security affairs has also diminished – especially as counter-terrorism policing and states of permanent terrorist emergency, once characteristic of the Northern Ireland conflict, have been replaced with the dominant political narrative of the country as a peaceful and shared society to the wider world (Hillyard, 1988; Topping, 2008b).

Thus, the intention of this chapter is to re-examine the contemporary policing landscape in the country, with a particular focus on the juxtaposition of the PSNI's current attempts to deliver a community-centred policing service in the face of a terrorist threat currently assessed as 'severe' by MI5, the highest level in over 12 years (IMC, 2010; McDonald, 2011). Furthermore, it will also explore some of the key junctures between community and counter-terrorism policing in the country. Through drawing out the subtleties of the conflicted security landscape, it will provide a framework through which 'softer', enabling modes of policing may be conceived (or not) as potential alternatives to the lessons of 'hard-edged' counter-terrorism policing which for so long served merely to disenfranchise and damage relations between the state, the police and communities in Northern Ireland (McVeigh, 1994; Hillyard, 2009).

## Background

It has been ten years since the PSNI took its first, tentative steps onto the streets of Northern Ireland as the final piece of the political 'jigsaw' and as a means of rebalancing the policing landscape in favour of serving the whole community. As O'Rawe (2003) contends, with policing

having occupied a symbolic, central position as part of the conflict, there was always a feeling that if policing could somehow 'be got right', the foundations for a lasting peace could be laid. In this respect, from the introduction of various discriminatory and draconian 'emergency' legislative measures since 1921, through to police control and direction under successive partisan Unionist governments, the PSNI's forerunner, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), played a significant role in both precipitating *and* holding the 'green line' between the Unionist, Republican and British government triumvirate (Buckland, 1979; Scorer and Hewitt, 1981; Hillyard, 1988, 1994; McEldowney and Gunter, 2003). With over 3,500 conflict-related deaths (of which approximately 300 were members of the RUC), including 48,029 injuries, 37,034 shooting incidents, 16,360 bomb explosions and 19,666 people charged with terrorism offences from 1969 to 2002 alone, Northern Ireland has undoubtedly witnessed a bitter, armed conflict (Hayes and McAllister, 2005). Yet, whatever the conflicting accounts of opposing political factions in regard to policing issues, the RUC consistently viewed itself as the bulwark between anarchy and order (cf. Ni Aolain, 2000; Ryder, 1997).

But central to the wider peace negotiations in Northern Ireland was the recognition of a need for a 'new start' to policing. Indeed, key to the deliberations of the 175 recommendations for reform under the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland (ICP) was the wresting of nearly 30 years of state monopoly on policing from the police and giving it back to the community (Topping, 2008a). However, it must be noted that the Patten Report was only the beginning of a process of policing change, which over the past decade has kept the PSNI firmly at the centre of political attention – both locally and internationally. With the issue of policing in the country having acted as 'meta-bargaining' as to the very nature of the conflict (Campbell *et al.*, 2003), the task of 'getting policing right' was (and still is) a function of the complex interplay between the social, cultural and political interfaces of the country's traditionally divided communities (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006), each with their own particular perspective on the 'shape' and delivery of policing within the new and inclusive landscape, which is itself informed by the recent history of policing experiences.

At a cursory level, one of the former Patten commissioners, Clifford Shearing, noted that the reforms to policing in Northern Ireland may

be conceived in two distinct 'streams' (Kempa and Shearing, 2005; Topping, 2008a). In terms of the first stream of reforms, they may be imagined as relating to some of the more physical and symbolic manifestations of policing change in the country, such as names, badges and the controversial nature of 50/50 recruitment. Looking to the second stream, it may be conceived as relating to broader issues around the governance of security or policing as more broadly conceived (Topping, 2008a: 378). On the one hand, the authors would argue that the first decade of change to the policing landscape in Northern Ireland has predominantly focused upon implementing the first stream of reforms as the physical foundations to a permanent, acceptable and inclusive change process for both Loyalist/Unionist and Republican/Nationalist communities across the country. But, on the other hand, it is the second stream, anchored in Patten recommendation 44 around community policing or the 'policing with the community' (under the rubric of the ICP), which is of importance – especially in relation to the PSNI's counter-terrorism capacity.

Indeed, the PSNI's predecessor, the RUC, was both feared and revered in terms of its ability to withstand and actively combat almost 30 years of violent conflict in Northern Ireland (Ellison and Smyth, 2000; Ryder, 1997; Weitzer, 1999). However, it should be noted that a key tenet of the Patten reform process was about engendering a shift within the police as an organization which would enable it to change from a reactive, hierarchical, militaristic and counter-insurgency *force* into a proactive, community-oriented *service* working with the grain of the communities in which it policed (O'Rawe, 2003; Brogden and Nijhar, 2005). However, interestingly, in terms of the weight of such expectations around policing change in the country at the operational, political and community levels, Mulcahy (1999: 278) notes that 'in the aftermath of a ... conflict, peace itself can constitute a crisis to the extent that it undermines the policies, practices and assumptions ingrained and institutionalised over the years'.

Therefore, within the post-conflict transitional space of Northern Ireland (as shall be discussed below), the authors would argue a much greater degree of analysis and understanding is required to negotiate the complex dynamics of the PSNI's role as part of its shift from its historical counter-insurgency role to community policing, while trying to balance these policing imperatives as part of the new policing and political landscapes and to reduce disconnections

with communities (both Protestant and Catholic) traditionally marginalized from the policing debate (Jarman, 2002; Byrne and Monaghan, 2008); while also dealing with the persistence of national terrorist threat (mainly) posed by the so-called dissident Republican paramilitaries (Frampton, 2010).

### Considering the policing environment

At least from the perspective of the PSNI, it has long been held that it has struggled – at an organizational level – to fully realize the implementation of Patten recommendation 44 in relation to community policing in line with the core recommendation of the ICP (Byrne and Monaghan, 2008; ICP, 1999; Topping, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). With the PSNI as a relatively 'young' organization due to the changes in composition of the service as part of the reform process, this too has raised questions in respect of the experiential base underpinning its counter-terrorism capacity – once world-renowned in terms of the de facto commodification and export of such expertise on a global scale (Brogden, 2005; Ellison and O'Reilly, 2008; BBC News, 2010a; *Belfast Telegraph*, 2010a). The departure of many experienced, senior officers from the organization through generous severance packages has depleted the organization of both strategic and operational counter-terrorism capacity and knowledge. However, while recent criticism has been levelled at the PSNI's ability to deliver on both the community policing and counter-terrorism fronts, it is also important to note that the operational environment in which the PSNI polices is by no means conducive to the delivery of 'normal' policing within any Peelian conception of the term as part the still conflicted and divided post-conflict society of Northern Ireland (Kelling, 2005; Topping, 2008b; Frampton, 2010; McDonald, 2010).

In reference to this environment – and specifically violent dissident Republicanism – while their terrorist capabilities are in no way comparable to the threat posed by mainstream Republican paramilitaries at the height of the conflict, it must be acknowledged that dissident factions are still engaged in an armed campaign, along with the delivery of 'civil policing', within certain areas of Northern Ireland. This has manifested itself through the planting of viable explosive devices and concerted efforts to kill members of the security forces across the country (*Belfast Telegraph*, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c,

2010a; *Irish News*, 2008, 2009), resulting in the deaths of British soldiers Patrick Azimkar and Mark Quinsey outside the Massereene Barracks in Co. Antrim on 8 March 2009 and the murders of Constable Stephen Carroll on 10 March 2009 and Constable Ronan Kerr on 12 April 2011 (McDonald and Townsend, 2011). Indeed, it is a continuing feature of the post-conflict landscape that the terrorist threat is now at its highest in 12 years, with PSNI annual statistics evidencing 78 recorded 'shooting and bombing' incidents in 2006/7, rising to 129 by 2009/10 (IMC, 2010; Kearney, 2010; Owen & Dutta, 2011; PSNI, 2011). It is also important to recognize that paramilitary activity has not been limited solely to those from a Republican background. Within a number of Loyalist working-class communities, paramilitary structures still remain in place to control communities and orchestrate widespread violence, as witnessed in East Belfast during June 2011, where approximately 500 people were involved in violence over three nights, which included gun battles between Loyalist and Republican paramilitary groupings along with the shooting of a Press Association photographer. It is fair to conclude that the presence of proscribed organizations at the community level along with their terrorist capacity is thus far from being consigned to the annals of Northern Irish history (McDonald, 2011).

Therefore, within this violent environment, along with the competing community policing and counter-terrorism agendas that existed (and still exist), there was significant disengagement and alienation of the Republican/Nationalist and, to a lesser extent, Unionist/Loyalist communities from any normal understanding of interaction with the police (Ellison and Mulcahy, 2001; Mulcahy, 2006; Topping, 2008a). When combined with lingering police legitimacy issues associated with the legacy of the conflict, along with the fact that a sizable minority of the population in Northern Ireland remains at best ambivalent about engaging with the PSNI on what may be conceived as 'normal' policing issues (Byrne and Monaghan, 2008), one becomes aware of the conflicted policing landscape.

### **The operational boundaries of 'alternative' counter-terrorist policing**

Beyond the practical operating environment which shapes the delivery of policing in Northern Ireland, one of the key starting points

from which to consider 'softer' counter-terrorism strategies is with the organizational priorities attached to these seemingly antithetical policing imperatives within the PSNI. As noted above, one of the central issues for policing reform in the country was about the police moving away from their militaristic, counter-insurgency roots and placing community policing at the core of deliberations as part of the ever-normalizing policing environment (Ryder, 1997; Topping, 2008a). However, somewhat ironically for the PSNI, this appears to be at variance with its colleagues in the constabularies of England and Wales as counter-terrorism policy continues to pervade and destabilize its Peelian roots which for so long have underpinned values and relations between the police and the policed (Emsley, 2009).

However, in specific reference to the PSNI and beyond the empirical evidence which has questioned the operationalization of its shift to becoming a community-oriented service, a more recent inquiry from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) (2007) has also posed questions with regard to the suitability of the PSNI's 'shape' in respect to this shift in the post-Patten era. It is thus interesting to observe that HMIC has confirmed that the PSNI still retains a relatively militaristic structure to deliver Patten's community policing vision, with its retention of public order and counter-insurgency capabilities in comparison to 'most similar forces' in England and Wales as a striking organizational feature.

Even six years after the implementation of the ICP reforms, only 35 per cent of District Commanders in Northern Ireland have claimed to be carrying out policing under what might be conceived as 'normal' conditions, as the persistence of a terrorist threat constrains the ability of the PSNI to freely walk the streets in many areas of the country (HMIC, 2007). In addition, there are approximately six times as many officers dedicated to public order policing duties, with four times as many officers dedicated to intelligence duties, than 'most similar forces', although a proportion of this capacity is undoubtedly due to the lack of immediate mutual aid from police services in England, or indeed An Garda Siochana. Moreover, the police-to-population ratio in Northern Ireland, at approximately 1:230, still remains one of the highest in the Western world. Thus, when combined with a total of 86,073 overtime hours undertaken by PSNI officers to cope with the extra public order demands (equivalent to an extra £7,266 per officer per annum) in 2007 alone, it gives a clear indication of the

priority which has been attached to (and necessity to retain) public order and terrorist policing capabilities in Northern Ireland (HMIC, 2007). On the one hand, it must be remembered that such facts actually pre-date the now heightened 'severe' terrorist threat in 2011. On the other hand, these facts only serve to reinforce the paradox of attempting a 'community policing' approach within Northern Ireland's conflicted democracy, especially where:

the threat of domestic terrorism is always present in Northern Ireland ... because officers are now more visible in communities where historically they would not have patrolled on foot or on bicycle, they are more vulnerable to attack ... the threat level is currently assessed as high. (Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde, cited in Marchant, 2007: 5)

Furthermore, with an increase in the terrorist security budget of £245 million over the next four years (BBC News, 2011b), there has not been any equivalent funding or implementation of strategies for the delivery of community policing beyond the Chief Constable's broad policy development around personal, protective and professional policing and the publication of the set of policing commitments (PSNI, 2011).

Thus, from an objective viewpoint, what emerges from the evidence is significant disjuncture between the PSNI's counter-terrorism and community policing capacities in the country. First, once in place, counter-terrorism structures, mentalities and modes of police operation are not easily dismantled and cannot suddenly be removed where a terrorist threat remains in place (Moran, 2008). Secondly, within the PSNI there still remains a very distinct cultural and operational separation between officers involved in counter-terrorism policing and those involved in community-oriented policing (Topping, 2008b). In this respect, any attempts to reconcile the differences between the PSNI's intelligence-gathering capacities and its neighbourhood policing operations beyond the parameters of the National Intelligence Model have yet to become apparent.

On a third and related point, a problematic and controversial issue which still dominates the policing agenda in Northern Ireland is that of the use of informants (Moran, 2010). With the legacy of collusion between the state, the police and Republican/Loyalist communities

still contaminating the discourse of counter-terrorism operations in Northern Ireland, alternative means of gathering information, such as low-level 'community intelligence' gathered by neighbourhood officers on the ground, are unlikely to take hold. This is especially so when current modes of counter-terrorism practice have also become a 'path dependent' means for the PSNI over the course of the conflict (Peters, 1999). This is especially so when: i) recent data suggests that only 10 per cent of the PSNI's organizational capacity is actually dedicated to what might broadly be defined as neighbourhood policing duties (HMIC, 2011); and ii) holistic, community-level contact between the PSNI and many working-class Loyalist and Republican communities in Northern Ireland has yet to move beyond 'critical engagement' where contact with police remains at best an option of last resort (Byrne and Monaghan, 2008; Topping and Byrne, 2012).

In addition, the legacy of the conflict in terms of police investigations and operations within Northern Ireland has yet to be formally addressed within an agreed framework, which is highlighted by the contested nature of investigations by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (OPONI) and the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) within the PSNI (Lundy, 2011). To date, there has been at best an ad hoc and inconsistent approach to examining the historical roles and responsibilities of the RUC in delivering counter-terrorist policing associated with the conflict. As a result, the PSNI continues to be distracted, both financially and politically, by events from recent history, while communities from both sides find it increasingly problematic to distinguish between the old and the new policing dispensations. In this regard, the spectre of policing tactics related to the conflict (such as stop and search and the employment of terrorist legislation) continues to contaminate the current drive towards the delivery of more normalized, community-oriented policing at a local level by the PSNI.

Finally, what cannot be discounted from thinking related to the parameters of alternative, softer styles of counter-terrorism policing in Northern Ireland is the role of the Security Service (MI5). Indeed, MI5 continue to exert a strong and significant influence on counter-terrorism operations, especially through covert operations (mainly) against Irish Republican Army (IRA) activity. However, the location of its second largest headquarters in the UK just outside Belfast is

a testament to the priorities of wider national concerns and priorities of the British government with regard to counter-terrorism in Northern Ireland. The fact that an estimated 60 per cent of MI5's electronic intercepts relates solely to monitoring dissident Republican terrorist activity (McDonald, 2008) demonstrates the trajectory of the Security and Intelligence Services, along with the PSNI, to continue within their current, path-dependent counter-terrorism strategy and policy.

Therefore, to give an overview of the current operational boundaries constraining potential movements and thinking by the PSNI towards 'softer' counter-terrorism strategies, the evidence would suggest that significant changes within both the PSNI and the current policing environment will be required to effect practical steps towards the Chief Constable's rather contradictory notion that:

it would be a mistake to say that policing can be separated into security policing and community policing when police officers rely upon community support to do their job, day-in and day-out. (BBC News, 2011a)

Although in a desirable operating environment, community policing and counter-terrorism strategies would compliment one another, the current evidence would point to the fact they *have* become mutually exclusive policing tasks for the PSNI, limiting the potential synergy between the two strategies as a means of 'squeezing' the operating space for dissident Republican activity.

### **Smoke and mirrors: grasping the nettle of Northern Irish terrorism**

In regard to the wider issues of dealing with home-grown terrorism in Northern Ireland, the peace process more generally has served a dual purpose in respect of what it signifies about progress within the conflicted polity. On the one hand, it demarcates a significant watershed in the country's brief history as part of the wider public rejection of violence as a means to political ends (Cox *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, in a Weberian sense the reforms to policing have acted as a referent for more egalitarian, consensual and legitimating shifts in the state's governance of its still-divided communities (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006). However, such sweeping changes to

the socio-political landscape in Northern Ireland have only served to obfuscate the reality of the nature of continuing terrorist activity at a local level, along with the embedded nature of both Loyalist and Republican paramilitary activity within communities, as shall be explored below.

Beyond the operational realities of counter-terrorism policing (as noted above), probably one of the most contested terrains with respect to the terrorism debate is through the 'framing' of the 'politics of peace'. Indeed, an obvious example is through the contest relating to the 'official' picture of terrorist activities in Northern Ireland. In spite of the officially graded 'severe' threat which currently exists, as detailed by HMIC:

There is a source of contention amongst some officers and the Police Federation of Northern Ireland when information is provided to the media (and other government departments) by PSNI on bombings and shootings. If asked by the media how many 'terrorist attack' (bombings or shootings) have taken place in Northern Ireland, or when presenting figures connected to terrorism, *PSNI respond with a figure around 25% of the absolute total*. This is because PSNI describes terrorism as an assault on national security. This does not include attacks on civilian targets or on relatives of members of the police service. (HMIC, 2011: 26, emphasis added)

In this regard, the de facto state of the security situation thus becomes a matter of interpretation by the police, an action which itself politicizes security affairs beyond their technical definition. Furthermore, with the Police Federation for Northern Ireland (PFNI) estimating that approximately 200 gun and bomb attacks have occurred against PSNI officers alone in 2010–11, a rather fractured picture emerges with regard to very nature of the terrorist threat in the country (McDonald, 2011). Ultimately, the battle for interpreting the scale and extent of the terrorist threat then becomes a site of conflict itself, detracting from the realities and impacts of such activities on officers and communities alike.

It should also be noted that, through the lens of peace process, even the concept of 'terrorism' and paramilitary activity (along with responses to it) has been politically commodified, which has done little except to simplify and polemicize what is complex and multi-faceted

problem, shielding the issue from wider counter-terrorism responses or debate. A primary example of this may be observed through the implementation of the CONTEST strategy in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the authors are aware that within the PSNI, while the CONTEST strategy exists at an official level, Republican politicians have been extremely resistant to the language surrounding the 'Pursue' strand because of the historical connotations relating to the use of informers and collusion in Northern Ireland (HM Government, 2011). The extent of this opposition has been such that the CONTEST strategy has all but disappeared from the official and political discourse of counter-terrorism in this country, regardless of knowledge relating to operational scope or delivery.

Furthermore, a key issue which has been consistently ignored as part of the polemic, politicized debates surrounding counter-terrorism policing in the country has been the nature of the terrorist activity being dealt with. A feature of the activities of proscribed organizations in Northern Ireland is their multi-faceted nature, where issues of sovereignty, dissent from the peace process and organized crime underpin the basis for that which falls under the banner of terrorism.

Thus, far from paramilitary groupings operating as 'single issue' or religiously motivated terrorist groups with clear targets and goals employing a single *modus operandi* (Martin, 2006), the boundaries of their activities on both the Republican and to a lesser extent the Loyalist sides are somewhat blurred in respect of their operating capacities. In addition to their ability to plant viable explosive devices and kill members of the security forces, activities under the 'terrorist' umbrella also include: disruptive campaigns to transport and commerce through 'hoax' security alerts; intra-community paramilitary policing and 'punishment' attacks; inter-community attacks between Loyalist and Republican areas; the perpetration of organized crime; and the orchestration of mass public order violence. However, as noted by Topping and Byrne, such differentiation:

continues to remain largely hidden from the policing and political discourse. This has tended to be deliberately crafted through a 'new' security discourse propagated by Government and the media – with those involved in paramilitary activity painted as 'conflict junkies' and 'Neanderthals'. Furthermore, attacks have

also been levied on the coherence of their political ideologies, with notions of politics replaced by a narrative of paramilitarism as a form of personal pursuit and gain through drugs, criminality and organized crime ... a difficulty with this over-simplistic political frame of assessment is that localized paramilitary policing tends to be conflated with the national terrorist threat posed by dissident Republicans; and packaged as an isolated aberration of the peace-time landscape. (Topping and Byrne, 2012)

Thus, without sufficient acknowledgement of the 'layered' nature of activities involving proscribed organizations in Northern Ireland, recourse to potential alternative modes of counter-terrorism policing are dashed on the Leviathan of overarching 'security objectives', which trump softer strategies as first-line modes of protection of communities and the state.

Set against this macro-frame, policing tactics and operations used as part of counter-terrorism approaches are analysed and perceived in equally blunt terms, regardless of the purpose served or outcomes achieved. A primary example may be observed through recent debates concerning the use of 'stop and search' tactics by the PSNI under s. 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000. First, the occurrence of over 10,000 stop and searches recorded by the PSNI (prior to the European Court of Human Rights ruling it illegal in January 2010) and just 365 arrests is a clear example of what HMIC has noted as a lack of 'quality assurance processes in place to test claims of success in disrupting terrorist activity' (HMIC, 2011: 25), in spite of the PSNI's claims that the use of stop and search 'remains an essential tool in countering the terrorist threat' (BBC News, 2010b). Even at the political and community levels, unqualified, ritual conflagration between Unionist and Republican political parties over the necessity (or otherwise) of stop and search tactics by the PSNI does little except to recirculate historical discourse relating to debates on emergency powers (Hillyard, 2009; *Belfast Telegraph*, 2010c).

Ultimately, the overall effect of such blunt understandings relating to the nature of the terrorist threat, paramilitary activity and counter-terrorism responses by the state in Northern Ireland is to stagnate rather than enable community-focused debates relating to potential new ways to grasp the 'old nettle' of counter-terrorism policing in the country.

### Considering 'community' in the counter-terrorism debate

A central but seldom explored question related to 'softer', community-oriented approaches to counter-terrorism is precisely *how* communities can be brought on board to both influence and improve the police capacity to deal with the terrorist threat. And certainly, while issues of social cohesion, 'soft power' and community intelligence all feed into wider debate, the practical outworking of such laudable ideas is somewhat less clear (Innes, 2006; Spalek and Imtoul, 2007; Pickering *et al.*, 2008; Weisburd *et al.*, 2009). Due to the transitional character of Northern Ireland's policing and security landscape, such a task is further complicated for the PSNI as it attempts to find a balance between its counter-insurgency and community policing roles (Ellison, 2007). However, it is important to note that at least in some areas, local policing initiatives *are* continuing to be delivered on the ground as a means of circumventing overt, 'hard-edged' counter-insurgency tactics with a softer, bottom-up approach which conducts policing *through* the community as a means of 'squeezing' the space in which the dissident terrorist campaign still operates (*Belfast Telegraph*, 2009; IMC, 2010; McDonald, 2011).

One such innovative scheme currently operating with success in the 'G' District area of Derry and Strabane in Northern Ireland is that of a 'cultural intelligence' programme targeted at the PSNI's response officers that is designed specifically to overcome the historical distance and distrust between Republican (and to a lesser extent Loyalist) communities and the police, to instill within PSNI officers a greater sense of operational and political sensitivity to their operations, and specifically to help the Republican communities of Derry (where dissident paramilitary activity tends to be concentrated outside of Belfast) move beyond politically 'cognitive' to wholehearted community support for the PSNI.

With an implicit recognition that the majority of PSNI response officers in the area were often either young, inexperienced or had limited contextual knowledge of the Republican and Loyalist working-class neighbourhoods in which they policed, the scheme draws parallels with Skogan's 'asymmetrical encounters' thesis (2006). With legacy issues around counter-insurgency policing during the conflict and past experiences of policing by community members

at the hands of the RUC, combined with perceived limitations to the PSNI's community policing in a contemporary context, it was recognized that a significant, extra 'cultural value' could be attached to each and every 'contact' between the PSNI and the local community. Thus, at the heart of the scheme lay the importance of getting policing 'right' at the individual officer and organizational level within the area (Hillyard, 1985; Mulcahy, 2006; Byrne and Monaghan, 2008). This is because, as contemporary research has indicated, where officers are failing to engage fully with such hard-to-reach communities, it can aid in the creation of a 'social space' in which the dissident paramilitary groups may operate more freely to garner support through dealing with the germane concerns of local residents (*Belfast Telegraph*, 2010b; Topping and Byrne, 2012).

In this regard, the 'cultural intelligence' training model is about bringing together local police officers and community activists within G District to discuss not just contemporary concerns around the delivery of policing in the area, but also *cultural concerns* over counter-terrorism policing in regard to how the potential antagonisms of current, 'hard-edged' policing tactics (often reminiscent of the conflict) can best be mitigated – as a means of limiting damage to the tentative police–community relations which exist, while simultaneously enhancing community attitudes towards procedural justice (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Byrne and Monaghan, 2008; Topping, 2008b; *Belfast Telegraph*, 2010c). Indeed, a key proposition of the model is that dissident Republican paramilitarism is not a separate social 'entity' that operates at some peripheral community level; rather, such terrorist activity is bound up *within* the social fabric of Republican communities because of the political, cultural and segregation issues in the area which provide the 'space' in which the dissident terror groups can operate. Therefore, a security response alone will only succeed alongside the withdrawal of public support for dissident Republican activities.

Thus, beyond merely acting as a 'sounding board' for the grievances of local communities, the programme is designed to act as an educational tool for both the PSNI *and* individuals in the community to better understand the parameters of the fragile social chains which are ultimately necessary to facilitate information flows and networks relating to terrorist activity. moreover, the selection of key, trusted community individuals to participate in the programme

provides a means for those with a level of community influence and association to have a direct (if holistic) operational input into the policing of the locale – itself bridging the counter-terrorism and community policing agendas.

On a more fundamental level, another outcome of the programme has been that PSNI officers take *personal responsibility* for their conduct and tactics by incorporating and applying the community-based learning and awareness into the everyday (counter-terrorism) operational life of the area. With the historical antecedents of police-community interaction (as noted above) demanding much more than merely 'satisfactory' service to ameliorate experiences of the past, each and every contact was to be observed as either a 'stepping stone' or a 'stumbling block'. Thus, returning to the fragile chain of social contact conception, the programme aids officers in acquiring a distinct form of 'operational awareness' as a means of bridging the community/counter-terror policing divides.

First, it must be noted that the issue of community 'identity' has for a long time been a key contention within (mainly) Republican/Nationalist communities during the conflict and post-conflict periods of Northern Irish history in terms of the 'targeting' of police operations (Hillyard, 1994; *Belfast Telegraph*, 2010c). Thus, the programme is about increasing officer awareness of previously hidden social attitudes and variations in identity even within 'hard-to-reach' communities where threats to officer safety are high – beyond the desocializing and blanket approaches of counter-terrorism tactics of the past, so often the *fait accompli* of blunt and damaging police operations in the country. Secondly, through such a *community-focused* rather than *community-targeted* approach to policing, a distinct shift from a *control* to an *enabling* police agenda may also be observed. With officers better able to negotiate the community 'topology' of the area beyond a purely security lens, counter-terror strategy then moved beyond 'all or nothing' operations towards a more sophisticated and integrated form of counter-terrorism policing to avoid whole sections of the community being 'punished' for the activities of a minority.

In this respect, the lesson of the 'G District' model concerns the need to create an enabling 'space' for a 'softer' policing discourse within an overarching counter-terrorism context and to help communities appreciate PSNI efforts at preventing dissident Republican terrorist

activity beyond the controlling and narrow parameters of terrorist legislation and policy – itself acting as an ever-expanding focus of, and referent for, distrust and dislocation between police organizations and the communities they are meant to serve (Hillyard, 2009).

### Conclusion

In exploring the 'conundrum of the community' as part of that which may be conceived as 'softer' approaches to counter-terrorism policing in Northern Ireland, it is clear that the juxtaposition between the PSNI's community-oriented and counter-terrorism roles remains somewhat strained. Even a decade after the reforms under the ICP (1999), the evolving and transitional nature of the policing landscape in the country has restricted the extent to which policing can both break from its (counter-terrorism) past and move forward into (community policing for) the future.

A key contention of the chapter has been the *limited* extent to which the PSNI has been able to deliver upon the community policing foundations as a central focus of the ICP (1999). However, this must also be set against the *limiting* security context in which policing is delivered, restricting the delivery of 'normal', Peelian conceptions of a police service to all but a limited selection of communities in Northern Ireland. Thus, in taking a step back from the evidence, there is somewhat of a mixed narrative of 'success' pervading contemporary policing debates in the country. On the one hand, political and police rhetoric is dominated by contentions of peace, normality and the need for communities previously dissociated from the state and the police to move into a 'new' beginning for policing. Yet, on the other hand, it is precisely those communities – mainly urban, working-class Protestant and Catholic communities – who are absorbing the cost of such 'colourful' accounts of 'peace'. With a heavily militarized police presence still dominating the style of policing received at a local level, it is still an apt contention that:

while the PSNI have been radically transformed in the post-Patten era, the change to policing on the ground has been largely unaffected, and in many areas ... policing largely mirrors the reactive style of policing characteristic of the Troubles, albeit in a relative peace-time context. (Topping, 2008a: 391)

Ultimately, there is little evidence to suggest that 'softer' styles of policing by the PSNI, in view of the current climate, would have any discernable effect upon the macro-level terrorist threat posed by dissident Republican factions at present. At a local level, examples of good practice – as with the 'G District' model noted above – are yielding benefits in terms of enabling PSNI officers to consider more fully the environment in which they deliver policing. However, this is but one localized solution within the complex, dynamic and deep-rooted 'Northern Ireland problem', which demands 'normal' policing yet the operationalization of which is tainted by the political legacy of counter-terrorism measures of the past. Thus, in terms of looking to the future and considering 'alternative' means of dealing with terrorism in the country, until the omnipresent 'abnormalities' associated with policing can be drawn out of the 'wound' of its transitional landscape, engaging communities on counter-terrorism issues will remain a conundrum beyond the tried-and-tested policing tactics which, the evidence suggests, have become so ingrained within the PSNI at a strategic and operational level – not least because that conundrum is itself a source of the continuing terrorist threat to the PSNI and communities alike.

### **Case study: the PSNI's G District Cultural Intelligence Model**

The PSNI's 'G' District covers the north-west corner of Northern Ireland, encompassing the council areas of Strabane, Limavady, Foyle and Magherafelt. The District has a population of approximately 145,000, with almost 67 per cent defining themselves as Catholic, although this demographic balance is not spread evenly in geographical terms. The main focus of G District is the City of (London) Derry, the name of which provides the focus for social and political tension itself in regard to Catholic (Derry) or Protestant (Londonderry) identification and nomenclature. More recently, the City of Derry has been awarded the title of UK City of Culture for 2013, cementing the significant strides for the city as it has shifted out of conflict and into an era of relative peace.

However, below the surface, G District still suffers from a host of conflict-related issues which impact upon the delivery of 'normal' policing by the PSNI. With much of the area, and particularly the

centre of Derry, still affected by the recent memory of the conflict (epitomized by 'Bloody Sunday'), riven by sectarian division, the continued presence of dissident republican paramilitaries and their archaic policing tactics, and a series of bomb attacks in the city, the task for the PSNI to deliver community policing in any form has been at best challenging. While local neighbourhood officers on the ground have been making progress in terms of interacting with Republican/Nationalist communities, the overarching 'severe' dissident Republican terrorist threat has entrenched the dominance of counter-terrorism over community policing approaches in much of the area. Indeed, beyond the operational conundrum of attempting 'normal' policing in the area, at a political level there is also pressure on the PSNI to depart from counter-insurgency policing that is reminiscent of the conflict.

A key issue for policing in the area, outside that of the locally based neighbourhood policing teams, has been the use of response officers in dealing with day-to-day policing issues. With response officers used to cover large geographical areas within G District, it is perceived that they lack key contextual and local knowledge of neighbourhood teams in the delivery of policing operations. In this regard, beyond the need to deliver merely 'satisfactory' policing in the area, at a social and political level the PSNI must also attempt to provide a service which can ameliorate the recent experiences of the local population in terms of previous experiences of policing in the locality, which was dominated by counter-insurgency tactics during the conflict. As a means of circumventing this gap between neighbourhood and response officers, G District implemented 'cultural intelligence' training in order to provide response officers with a broader contextual and historical knowledge of the area and its residents. Designed specifically to overcome the historical distance and distrust between Republican (and to a lesser extent Loyalist) communities and the police, the training was also about instilling within PSNI officers a greater sense of operational and political sensitivity to their policing delivery and specifically to help the Republican/Nationalist communities of Derry move beyond politically 'cognitive' to wholehearted community support for the PSNI.

In this respect, it was recognized that a significant, extra 'cultural value' could be attached to each and every 'contact' between the PSNI and the local community. Thus, at the heart of the scheme lay

the importance of getting policing 'right' at the individual officer and organizational levels within the area.

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