



University of HUDDERSFIELD

University of Huddersfield Repository

McDaid, Shaun

Book Review: John Horgan, *Divided we Stand: The Strategy and Psychology of Ireland's Dissident Terrorists* (Oxford University Press USA, 2013)

Original Citation

McDaid, Shaun (2013) Book Review: John Horgan, *Divided we Stand: The Strategy and Psychology of Ireland's Dissident Terrorists* (Oxford University Press USA, 2013). *Irish Studies Review*. ISSN 0967-0882

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/19073/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

Divided We Stand: The Strategy and Psychology of Ireland's Dissident Terrorists, by John Horgan, New York, Oxford University Press (USA), 2013, 224 pp., £22.50 (hardback), ISBN 9780199772858

Despite a rocky fifteen year peace process, seats in government for nationalists and republicans, and a reconstituted police force, Northern Ireland is still plagued by the spectral threat of sporadic paramilitary violence. By far the most serious security threat is that posed by violent dissident republicans (VDRs). John Horgan's *Divided We Stand* seeks to explain and understand the persistence of dissident republicanism in Northern Ireland: who are the dissidents? What drives them strategically and psychologically and what can policymakers do to combat the dissident threat?

There has been a plethora of relatively recent articles, books and reports on Ireland's dissidents (for example the work of Frampton, Currie and Taylor and Tonge). What makes Horgan's work different is the comprehensive nature of the source base which he uses. The book's findings are based on the extensive International Center for the Study of Terrorism data collection on dissident activity and personnel. Horgan and his colleagues have assembled an impressive dataset, based entirely on open source material, detailing some 1244 dissident events between 1994 and mid-2011 (of which 899 were violent) (15). This data is analysed to assess trends in dissident activity, which are presented later in the book.

Early chapters provide valuable context on the plethora of dissident organisations, both armed groups and political organisations. This is not always an easy task, given, as the cliché has it, the historical propensity towards splits and factionalism within republican groups. The case of Republican Sinn Féin (RSF) is illustrative. In 2010, the Limerick branch of this micro-party split from the main organisation. It still uses the RSF name, but is commonly referred to as 'Real Sinn Féin'. To confuse matters further, the leaders of both factions share the same Christian name (Des Long and Des Dalton) (27). These early chapters will undoubtedly be of the greatest benefit to those new to the study of Irish republicanism.

Not the least of the book's merits is Horgan's interweaving of highly detailed, localised data with a rich seam of theoretical and comparative literature on the study of terrorism that is refreshingly applied to the case of Ireland's dissidents. After providing the reader with a firm grounding in the context in which dissident groups emerged and operate, Horgan forensically examines the VDR data. Such data-driven research can demonstrate changes and trends in terrorist activity, and consequently inform analysts and policymakers seeking to understand and combat such actions (47-8). However, some of the data, for example the statistical analysis of the occupational backgrounds of those involved in VDR activity, tell us more about the sociological profile of those engaged with these groups than their strategy and psychology.

Horgan identifies three 'waves' of dissident activity. The third, current, wave has shown a steady increase in dissident activity, both violent and non-violent acts such as hoax bombings. Not only is activity becoming more frequent, but also more lethal (71). The proliferation of groups, and rise in the number of 'punishment style' attacks demonstrates the

dissidents' attempts to gain control in local republican areas, undermining public confidence in the Police Service of Northern Ireland, still regarded by dissidents as repressive agents of British colonialism.

Horgan's analysis shows that while the tactics of VDR groups are quite clear, their long-term strategy is less so. In the short-to-medium-term they aim to destabilise the security situation, undermine Sinn Féin and the PSNI, and hope to provoke the Army back on the streets. Not only to VDR groups realise they have scant support and little chance in attaining their goals, they revel in this pariah status. Dissidents point out that previous 'true' republican factions were also unpopular, notably the 1916 rebels, from whom VDR groups draw inspiration.

Unlike much existing work on Ireland's dissidents, *Divided We Stand* includes a chapter with detailed suggestions for a counter-VDR strategy. The recommendations made, in common with some other recent literature on counter-terrorism, tread a fine line between neither under-reacting, nor over-reacting to the threat. This may involve risky, or unpalatable, decisions, such as encouraging dissidents into the political process, or promoting outlets where dissent can be expressed in non-violent ways (157-8).

Horgan highlights the crucial role that Sinn Féin, the dissidents' *bête noire*, can play in any successful counter-VDR strategy. The party's actions and statements 'can and do show the irrelevance of, and the true nature of, the VDR groups', which cause much damage within nationalist communities as a result of violence and criminality (168).

In the run-up to the centenary of the 1916 rising, the role of commemoration will also be a crucial front in the war against VDR groups, attempting to legitimise their continued commitment to armed struggle. Sinn Féin will also be to the fore of these events, and it is here where their prominence in republican commemorations, whilst potentially undercutting VDR groups, might damage the political process to which it is committed. It would be a tragic irony if in delivering a *coup de grâce* to violent dissident narratives, Sinn Féin irreparably damaged its fragile relations with unionists, already suffering during the current culture wars between the communities.

John Horgan's book provides ample evidence that, although unlikely to derail the political process and lacking support within the nationalist community, dissident violence is increasing. *Divided We Stand* is to date the most authoritative account of those who commit or seek to justify that violence, and the most persuasive analysis of how to deal with the threat. Scholars of Irish politics, and terrorism studies more generally, will find it an indispensable resource.

Shaun McDaid
University of Huddersfield
S.McDaid@hud.ac.uk