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CHAPTER 8

Training for Urban Resistance: The Case of the Provisional Irish Republican Army

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The difference between a well-trained and poorly-trained terrorist organization is the difference between tactically successful attacks and aborted operations, between groups that can persist under pressure and those which are penetrated and rolled up by intelligence and law enforcement. The well-trained terrorist sets a bomb that achieves his tactical and operational goals; the poorly trained terrorist sets a bomb that kills himself, rather than the intended victims of the attack.

Understanding the efficacy of terrorist training efforts is, therefore, a key element in assessing the threat posed by a terrorist group. Doing so requires more than simply process or content measures of group training: Information on the time a group spends training will be a poor indicator if little information is taught to members during that time, and listings of the topics of training will only be a partial picture if knowledge on those topics is poorly transmitted. Instead, assessing that efficacy requires insights into what training really accomplishes for the group, expressed by how the information passed to members meets the organization's needs and the impacts of training on group outcomes. As with many areas in the study of terrorism, there is seldom sufficient information readily accessible to characterize fully the value of group training efforts. Terrorists are less likely than educators to evaluate rigorously their training efforts and, if they do so, it is unlikely that the results will become public knowledge. Using the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) as an example case, this chapter will describe and, to the extent possible, evaluate a terrorist training effort based on the types of information available in the open literature.

Through the decades of conflict in Northern Ireland, the PIRA waged a persistent and high-intensity campaign of violence. Operating in areas rang-

ing from urban Belfast to rural South Armagh, PIRA carried out thousands of separate operations in an attempt to advance their goal of Irish reunification and removal of British involvement in Northern Ireland. Applying tactics ranging from selective assassination to large-scale bombing operations, the group had to build expertise in a wide range of subject areas to maintain its desired level of military capability. Faced with the constant threat of penetration and compromise by technologically adept and sophisticated security forces, PIRA also had to build the capabilities required to persist under ongoing counterterrorist pressures.

Effective training processes to disseminate the knowledge required for both offensive and defensive operations among group members (or, as PIRA formally referred to them, Volunteers) were a major component of the group's activities throughout its operational history. Emphasizing the importance of training activities to the group's leadership, PIRA had a department within its general headquarters (GHQ) dedicated to Volunteer training. The training department was tasked with maintaining all the organizational and physical infrastructures needed to carry out required training of the group's membership.¹ The following sections will address PIRA training in three areas, focusing on how they

1. inducted new recruits to support its military activities;
2. taught Volunteers new skills to support and improve the group's operational capability; and
3. provided members with the intelligence and counterintelligence skills needed both to collect the information required for operations and to prevent security force penetration or disruption of group activities.

The discussion of each area will describe the relevance of training of this type, describe PIRA's efforts, and—to the extent possible—assess the effectiveness of those efforts based on available information.

Inducting the New Recruit: Socialization and “Political Training”

For any organization, new members must be educated about the group's history and taught what they need to know to become a part of the organization.² Terrorist and other clandestine organizations are no different. Such socialization brings new members into group culture and provides the ground rules for what it means to join and be an effective member of the organization.

Descriptions are available of the socialization processes PIRA had in place for training and inducting new members into the group and training

them, written both by government and security force members opposing them and by PIRA Volunteers:

In [his first] three months [the recruit] is asked to turn up once a week for a training session. During these sessions, which are taken by older men in the organization, the recruit is taught what Republicanism means, what it means to him, and is taught the policy of the movement.³

Other descriptions of initial recruit training from later in the conflict suggest that this element of Volunteer induction remained stable over time: “[In 1979, my contact] arranged for me to start receiving my official induction into the organization—a long series of lectures and talks . . . which [covered] the duties and responsibilities of volunteers, as well as explaining the history of the movement, the rules of military engagement, and anti-interrogation techniques.”⁴ J. Bowyer Bell, a scholar of insurgency and observer of PIRA for many years, emphasized the importance of such socialization—transmitting the philosophy of the movement—in PIRA’s training programs, even taking precedence over the military goals of training: “An underground army inevitably has a training program, at least in theory . . . [but] they are far more concerned with maintaining the creed than in instilling the techniques of war.”⁵ While such a statement may overstate the ideological components of such training as compared to its more functional aspects, it does emphasize the importance of socialization of new recruits as part of a training effort. Although training may not directly build military capabilities on its own, its contribution to group cohesion and management means that it cannot be ignored.

Initial training also provides groups with the opportunity to assess new recruits and judge their fitness for membership. Such instances are important gatekeeping functions for groups, particularly clandestine ones. Moving beyond lectures to full participation in PIRA required a decision by the recruit,⁶ and it required a similar decision by the trainer that the recruit was fit to join: “Throughout this initial training, the recruit is continually watched by the I.R.A. to make sure that he would not present a security risk to the organisation. ‘If he drinks too much or talks too much we would not accept him,’ the instructor said.”⁷

Assessing the effectiveness of such initial training activities requires insight into what the group was trying to accomplish by doing it. Some group statements suggest that the goals of training in this area were relatively modest: “‘The recruits are not taught to argue policy,’ the instructor said in answer to a question, ‘We leave that to Sinn Fein. In years gone by they would be, but our main priority at the moment is getting them fully trained and into active service.’”⁸ Against this background, the stability of these elements in PIRA’s training regimen through time suggests that the group

valued their results and believed it was effective in accomplishing what was intended.

Although later descriptions of PIRA training suggest that political components were an enduring aspect of training, they also suggest that there were tradeoffs between socialization of new recruits and the need to transmit military knowledge. Statements suggest that military training increased in emphasis over political training for reasons of practicality:

With all this talk of guns and ammunition, it'd be wrong to give the impression that an IRA training camp is purely a military experience. Practical limitations make it largely so—time is short, with a lot of weapons training that can't easily be done elsewhere, and there's not much point having formal political lectures surrounded by IRA guns.⁹

Military Training

The Provisional Irish Republican Army was formed as a result of a split in the Republican movement in 1969. Because many of its members had already acquired experience in earlier violent activities, PIRA did not begin from a standing start. Even with this advantage, however, the group's capabilities early in its operational career were quite limited: "It may be difficult nowadays to believe that inexperienced youths could pit small revolvers against rifles in the hands of trained soldiers, but this actually happened. I had never fired a revolver in training, nor had anyone I knew. We hoped to hit."¹⁰ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the primary activities of the organization were attacks that relied on very little training or expertise—throwing stones and gasoline bombs—and were, as a result, of limited impact.¹¹ This lack of expertise early on resulted in some significant costs to the organization.

One such cost of lack of experience is simple ineffectiveness. Published assessments of PIRA's capabilities cited several failed attacks and attributed the cause of failure to the poor training of its members: "Relatively few of the nightly shooting attacks on security force patrols, however, cause death or serious injury, since most appear to be carried out by relatively inexperienced volunteers and since individual soldiers and policemen and their vehicles are reasonably well protected."¹² Contemporary assessments by the security forces echo similar sentiments: "It is of interest that much of the IRA's shooting against the Security Forces, although greater in quantity, is becoming increasingly wild and is not pressed home."¹³ The consequences of such expertise shortfalls can go beyond ineffectiveness, however. Reportedly, some early casualties to PIRA resulted from "friendly fire"—not because of difficulties in distinguishing friend from foe, but simply because a Volunteer lacked the expertise to control the submachine gun he was

using during an attack.¹⁴ In the use of explosives, shortfalls in training and expertise claimed even more group lives:

Despite the number of bombing operations, the Provos' technique left much to be desired. Not only was the technical level of the various devices a generation out of date but also the volunteers' experience and training was limited. The inevitable result was a series of premature explosions that killed and maimed over a score of volunteers. Safety precautions were ignored in the name of expedience or out of ignorance—and the toll was worse than inflicted by the British Army during the height of bombing operations.¹⁵

Such failures and their associated costs provided a clear demonstration of the value of military training for the group—improved capabilities would pay off through reducing the toll on the group in casualties and ineffective operations.

General Military Training

One of PIRA's answers to these difficulties was to broaden training to arm its members not only with weapons but also with the expertise required to use them. Descriptions of the training curriculum from early in the conflict indicate that training covered a range of military skills, including the use of a variety of weapons. "The majority of recruits undergo a week's training at one of the camps in Eire, during which they are instructed in small arms handling, target practice, demolition techniques and field craft."¹⁶ More experienced members would take the recruits through stripping down weapons, cleaning and loading them, and instruction in basic firearms safety.¹⁷ Contemporary reports suggest that the full PIRA training program took at least six months,¹⁸ though part of the duration was driven by the constraints imposed on covert training. Unlike a traditional military, individual training was often carried out in short blocks—such as the five-day figure cited above—or in weekend sessions¹⁹ because of the risk of discovery. These early descriptions of training activities focus predominantly on use of arms, rather than broader military training in tactics and or unit operations.

Descriptions from later in the group's history are similar, but suggest the topics of training were gradually broadened to meet the group's evolving needs. Later training still included cleaning weapons, extensive "classroom" instruction in weapons and tactics, and some live-fire training, but also had a significant focus on sighting and aiming of weapons. These later training camps also reportedly covered operational planning and intelligence techniques (described below).²⁰ As the group built up more experience through its direct conflict with the security forces, the lessons learned were also incorporated into Volunteer training. For example, training was

augmented to describe specific defensive measures taken by security force personnel and, as a result, “what parts of an armored vehicle to aim at, how to fire most effectively in teams, and where and how to fire constructively after the all-important first aimed shot.”²¹

As part of the broader PIRA training effort, the group drew on published materials relevant to their military activities. Early on, the Provisionals drew on print sources for information on explosives and bombmaking: “I was surprised to find out how much information was available in the local library. I also studied the old IRA and British Army training manuals.”²² The group members were also encouraged to read other relevant sources such as the writings of “Che Guevara and the *International Revolutionary’s Handbook* [section on] ‘Urban Guerrilla Warfare,’”²³ although the methods for actually using the information in all such sources is not entirely clear.

To supplement what was available in published sources, the group also drew on the knowledge of former members of the military and other experts:

I was also active in Sinn Fein and sold the IRA newspaper door-to-door. . . . One of my regular customers turned out to be a former British Army sapper. . . . I would go to his house during the day and over a cup of tea or two he would draw sketches of different booby traps, explaining the properties of different explosives. Updated IRA training manuals were now available; I would show these to him and he would scribble notes and make comments on any errors or deficiencies.²⁴

Gaining access to such expert sources of information was particularly important because they can provide direct instruction critical to safely executing dangerous tasks such as working with explosives. First-person accounts of former PIRA members and other published reports cite the group drawing on other former members of the military, including the British Royal Marines Special Boat Squadron²⁵ and American veterans of the Vietnam conflict.²⁶ In a few cases, reports indicate the group developed its own experts through “sponsoring” individuals at educational institutions. In the early 1970s, PIRA reportedly persuaded a potential recruit to continue his education in Queen’s University but to follow a nontraditional curriculum intended to provide him the skills needed to become a master bomb maker.²⁷

In order to facilitate broader training among members of the group, PIRA devoted significant effort to preparing written resources to transmit training information. Training manuals were prepared covering weaponry, explosives, and battle tactics.²⁸ The best-known PIRA manual was *The Green Book* that, in addition to articulating the basis for the movement, also covered basic military information for new Volunteers.²⁹ The group

also produced field manuals for particular weapons to instruct members in their use. Use of such manuals is cited in descriptions of PIRA training camps in the 1980s.³⁰

A judgment about the effectiveness of group's military training would ideally be based on assessments of changes in its operational effectiveness before and after the training was carried out. Although comprehensive datasets to judge the efficacy of the training are not readily available, contemporary descriptions of the group's military activities suggest that PIRA's training efforts did pay off in increased effectiveness. Even early assessments of the group's activities cited improvement in PIRA operations in some areas: "In recent instances the gunmen [in Londonderry] have been hunting in packs, rather than individually. When in their packs, they are prepared to stand their ground and fight it out with the Security Forces. Gunmen are deploying to better fire positions and their aim seems to be more accurate."³¹ In the mid- to late 1970s, after training measures had been in place for several years, another British military assessment noted improvement in firearms accuracy and in the use of relevant technologies to improve performance: "Until recently, PIRA's shooting attacks have been inaccurate. Zeroing of weapons has been poor. But simple telescopic sights have been fairly frequently used. Marksmanship has now improved probably due to better training."³² The assessment of increased PIRA attention to sighting weapons echoes the description of shifts in training described above.³³

An effort to gauge the impact of a training program on overall group capabilities must also consider the number of individuals the group can train. While PIRA's training programs did improve the group's capabilities in weapons use and tactics, their impact was bounded by the difficulties in training large numbers of Volunteers while maintaining group security. The limited time available to train individual recruits limited the amount of information that could be provided. However, given the operational requirements of the group, that amount of information could have been enough:

The training carried out is . . . fairly basic. The standard of recruit is poor and with a maximum of ten days training, only the basic handling of one, or perhaps two, weapons can be covered. . . . General weapon training is [therefore] poor and achieves standards far inferior to those of a trained soldier. On the other hand, the standard required of a guerrilla . . . are not those required of a professional soldier. . . . The IRA standard is probably adequate for the operations they envisage.³⁴

The benefits of training are also dependent on how well the content transmitted to group members matches the operational context and practicalities faced by the group. Some PIRA members raised criticisms, calling into ques-

tion how well the group's training matched its circumstances, especially regarding the group's early efforts to train its membership. Those efforts were described as "very rudimentary [in] nature"³⁵ and were sometimes more appropriate to rural operations than the urban fight that made up a large part of PIRA's operations.³⁶

Specialized Training

While the constraints of clandestine operations made it difficult to train large numbers of individuals to high degrees of expertise, PIRA carried out a number of specialized training programs that produced smaller numbers of operatives with much higher skill levels. This type of training makes it possible for a group to build up the necessary mix of skills at appropriate levels for its operations, without having to make the much larger investments required to develop all of its members into specialists. PIRA's route for selecting individuals with particular talents for tasks such as sniper operations or bomb making—candidate specialists—was to track their progress through the groups general training programs and, when they were identified, direct them into more advanced courses of training.³⁷

This ability to specialize was made possible as the organization evolved and became more sophisticated; "as the IRA became more organized, volunteers began to specialize in areas such as sniping, explosives, logistics, or intelligence."³⁸ Such efforts were driven in part by effectiveness concerns, since it made it possible for some units to improve their capabilities in a specific area³⁹ and because certain weapons or tactics were more appropriate for operations in particular segments of the group's operational area. Specialization was supported by special "advanced courses" of training for particular areas⁴⁰ and ongoing "refresher" training for people with particular talents.⁴¹ Such specialization allowed the group to develop very advanced expertise in areas like bomb making, significantly broadening the group's operational flexibility and increasing its lethality.

Different units of PIRA sought to enhance specialized knowledge in their particular members. At some points during PIRA's operational career, some units sought to build up specialized expertise by bringing together Volunteers engaged in similar activities. Such commingling would encourage cooperative learning and more general improvement of the group's capabilities:

I tried to make fundamental changes to the way the [Derry] Brigade used explosives. . . . I sought to get all of the individual explosives officers, whether from the companies or battalions, into a pool over which I could exercise control, producing better training and improved safety standards. Pooling them would make higher quality operatives available to any unit or area, whereas before, each unit would have to rely on its own somewhat isolated explosives officer.⁴²

Other units used rotation or “apprenticeship” processes to spread specific types of knowledge or expertise: “The next two weeks were spent in a bomb factory in Carrigart, learning how to make explosives from . . . nitrate fertilizer. Once trained, the idea was that we would use the expertise to establish similar bomb factories in the South.”⁴³ The PIRA cell in South Armagh, a unit known for both its effectiveness and innovativeness, used a similar process of mixing experienced and new operatives so the veterans could provide mentoring and training within the unit:

South Armagh developed a slow process of training the volunteer. They would have taken raw recruits and put them in with skilled people and took them on. They didn’t push them too hard. And they got them used to what they were going to be faced with. This system meant that there were fewer mistakes and therefore fewer arrests in South Armagh than in any other IRA Brigade area.⁴⁴

Training processes that bring together specialists within the organization for group training and knowledge exchange have obvious security risks, however. Such mechanisms also spread information about who is in the group broadly and increase the potential damage if the group is penetrated or a member persuaded to inform on group activities to the security forces or police. As a result of damage caused to the group by security force penetration, PIRA reorganized into a more compartmented cellular structure in the late 1970s. This made such broad rotation processes less viable. However, even then there was reportedly still exchange of some individuals among cells, providing the opportunity for mentoring of less experienced PIRA members by their more senior colleagues⁴⁵ or transfer of expertise from advanced units to other parts of the organization.⁴⁶

Because of the heterogeneity they inherently create among different parts and members of a group, assessing the effectiveness of efforts at specialized training is more difficult. Unlike more general training, aggregate measures of group performance in areas such as marksmanship or concerns about the number of individuals that can be trained are not appropriate, because specialized training may focus on a very small number of group members. For individual units, performance at the unit level is relevant—such as the performance of the South Armagh unit described above. In some specialties, it is the outcomes of those specialists’ performance that is important. Part of the reduction in PIRA fatalities from their own explosives (cited above with respect to individual training) was also likely a result of the success of the group’s specialized training efforts as well, particularly in terms of the specialists who designed and constructed the devices used by other group members in their operations. However, because such assessments require much more specific data on a terrorist organization—down even to the individual level—the information required is frequently much more difficult to access.

Limitations in Clandestine Training

Although PIRA was quite successful in developing both general and specialized military training programs, the group's experience also demonstrates that the circumstances faced by clandestine groups can limit the scope and effectiveness of their training efforts. Three major areas impacting these kinds of group training programs are the need for secrecy, the resources required to carry out training, and the usefulness of obtaining training from sources outside the group.

Secrecy: Military Training and Risk to Group Security

In order to remain viable, terrorist organizations must maintain group security. Military training, however—particularly the “live fire” training that is required for individuals to build skills in the use of weapons—is difficult to conceal. At times, miscalculations associated with explosives training in particular were responsible for breaches in group security and significant risk to group members.⁴⁷ Although a considerable amount of information can be transferred to recruits about the use of weapons through lectures or other “dry training,” such instruction cannot teach the intuitive or tacit knowledge required for individuals to use weapons well.⁴⁸ Lectures can teach how to fire a weapon, but marksmanship requires direct experience.

For much of its operational career, the Republic of Ireland provided PIRA with a comparatively safe haven for logistical and training activities. Because of a sympathetic population, limited security force enforcement activities, and large areas in which to hide their activities, the risk to activities in the Republic were much less than analogous actions in Northern Ireland. According to one account, “Training is carried out in most parts of the republic, even as far south as Cork. . . . Training camps are of various types: a deserted farmhouse, a beach, or remote wood, dependent mainly on the security of the area.”⁴⁹ In addition to providing locations for broad organizational training in use of firearms and military tactics, the safe haven provided by the Republic was also important for training in louder, more destructive weapons like explosives and mortars:⁵⁰

Mortar firing using dummy shells usually took place at Inch Strand on the inner side of the Dingle peninsula—a six to seven-mile spit of firm white sand backed by dunes which was, in those days, out of the tourist season, a quiet and remote area. It was ideal for mortar training. You had a straight line of vision and could recover the dummy shells quite easily. The shells would also be undamaged from landing on the soft sand.⁵¹

The opportunity to test and experiment was significant in PIRA's ability to refine their explosives expertise, improve the operational functioning of

weapons systems they manufactured, and identify and correct design problems with their bombs and mortar systems.⁵² Such training and experimentation could not be done without noise.

Security of training camps was always an issue, however, even in the relative safety of the Republic. To minimize noise, live firing focused on lighter weapons

as the likelihood of discovery . . . using the quieter .22 caliber ammunition was negligible, and this type of ammunition was cheap and easily available. Such freedom gave us a great opportunity to monitor development and to correct bad habits. Only those we felt had reached the required standard were allowed a short firing session with heavier weapons at a location deeper in the mountains.⁵³

Camps were also located to minimize the impact of firearms noise, typically in areas where the noise would not carry far⁵⁴ or where the sound of firing would not be out of place, such as close to rifle ranges used by the Irish Army.⁵⁵ New recruits were also generally kept ignorant of the exact locations of the camps where they were training.⁵⁶ Compromise of the group's training facilities, which occurred at least once during the group's operational career, could decimate their capability to teach new members what they needed to know to become effective members of the organization. After one broad penetration and compromise of the training camps in the Republic, "[i]t was almost a year before the training department was able to resume normal business."⁵⁷

Resources: Weapons Are Expended in Training

In order to use sophisticated weapons effectively in combat, users must be sufficiently familiar with them to select appropriate targets for the weapons, hit their desired targets, and do so effectively. One way to build that familiarity is through live-fire training with the weapon. Beyond the difficulties in maintaining secrecy during such training, the resources expended on training can be a major constraint for a group. For advanced weapons in particular, which the terrorist may not have in large quantities, groups may be hesitant to "waste" available stocks in training.

In PIRA's case, a particularly good example of this situation is the group's use of rocket propelled grenade systems (specifically the RPG-7) early in its operational career:

Once the level of weapon sophistication is increased this problem of competence becomes more serious. . . . To anyone with an exposure to the military, a bazooka or [antitank rocket] is quite a simple weapon used for obvious purposes. The IRA had never been trained to use a launcher. The GHQ was

not about to practice with the few rockets available. Instead the RPG-7 was used for IRA purposes rather than in the way the maker had intended. Fired into military and police posts the armor-piercing rocket zapped in one side and out the other. The entire exercise proved futile for the IRA.⁵⁸

Contemporary assessments indicate that the weapon could have been effective, even for PIRA's desired applications against static targets "such as Security Force bases and prison walls," but that "[s]o far PIRA's inadequate training has resulted in the mishandling of the RPG-7."⁵⁹ The overall ineffectiveness of the weapons early in the group's career is likely a combination of shortcomings in target selection as well as the skills and practices of the individuals using the weapon. As cited by Bell, the limited availability of the weapons was important—most of the known arms shipments to the group included only a small number of the launchers (though they did include larger numbers of the grenades themselves).⁶⁰ The restricted supply increased the effective cost of certain types of training, specifically the live-fire training that could have improved end-user skills with the weapons,⁶¹ and meant that the quantity the group required for the weapon to be "useful" was higher than might otherwise be assumed.⁶²

Outside Training: Assistance from Sympathetic Groups Is Not Always Useful

One way individual groups can address the constraints placed on training in clandestine organizations, or the difficulties in finding and gaining access to the needed expertise and information, is to seek training from outside groups or sympathetic governments. In published sources on PIRA, there are a variety of reports that the group maintained links with—and obtained different types of training from—a range of international sources. One instance of "international interaction" may even predate the existence of the group itself. It has been reported that, "During the 1950s, those members of the IRA who were destined to form the core of the Provisional IRA in the 1970s were imprisoned in England with members of the Greek Cypriot terrorist group EOKA. By their own account they learned from them."⁶³

One group that is frequently cited as interacting closely with PIRA for training and technology transfer is the Basque group, *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (Basque Homeland and Freedom, or ETA). A range of public acknowledgements of "good relations" between the groups reportedly go back as far as 1974.⁶⁴ Accounts of former PIRA members suggest that the relationship goes back even further, to soon after PIRA's founding: "The links between ETA and the IRA run deep; the two organizations have often cooperated and pooled ideas, technology and training. As far back as 1972, ETA supplied the IRA with weapons. The accounts of what was supplied

differ but not the fact of it.”⁶⁵ Over the course of both groups’ careers, training was reportedly provided in both directions in a number of tactical and operational areas.⁶⁶

PIRA also reportedly maintained relationships with a variety of groups and governments in the Middle East, relationships which included PIRA members training at camps in a number of countries. Organizations cited include al-Fatah in Jordan,⁶⁷ the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Palestine Liberation Organization.⁶⁸ These links reportedly led to training in Algeria,⁶⁹ Libya,⁷⁰ and Lebanon.⁷¹

While many different linkages between PIRA and other entities have been described in a range of published sources, questions have also been raised about the strength of the linkages and the importance of any training provided to the group’s capabilities and effectiveness. Glover characterized the links as “elusive” and that “there are no signs that PIRA has either the intention or ability to deliberately foster them.”⁷² Others have suggested that it is “unclear how useful these links are in operational terms.”⁷³ A group member, interviewed by researcher Tim Coogan,⁷⁴ trivialized the contribution the training in Libya made to the group: “Don’t mind that talk about Libya. The Libyans were trained in conventional warfare. They couldn’t teach us anything.” Inferential support for the Volunteer’s assessment of the Libyan training can be found in the group’s experience with SA-7 surface-to-air missiles. In addition to providing PIRA with the weapons, group members were reportedly trained in their use in Libya.⁷⁵ But the group was never able to use the weapons effectively: “[T]he only known deployment of a [SA]-7 in Northern Ireland was against a Wessex [helicopter] at Kinawley on the County Fermanagh border in July 1991; the missile failed to lock on to the helicopter and exploded on the ground.”⁷⁶ If training was provided, it was apparently insufficient to provide the group with a sustained capability to maintain and use this particular weapon.

Intelligence and Counterintelligence Training

Identifying targets and planning terrorist attacks requires information. For the clandestine organization, much of the required information must be collected by group members and passed on to the planners and leaders making operational decisions. Recognizing the importance of effective intelligence collection, the topic was included in Volunteer training:

[R]ecruits are educated and informed of ways in which they are expected to both evaluate information and report it. Recruits are advised that any information may hold potential value to the organisation as “intelligence” which may facilitate or determine the tactics, pace and conduct of operational ac-

tivities. . . . PIRA recruits are reminded that they are not just “soldiers” but the “eyes and ears” for their own comrades. A PIRA intelligence manual states: “H.Q. knows only that which is reported and whatever it manages to glean through independent sources.”⁷⁷

The IRA’s training manual covers a range of good intelligence practices, including the need for individuals to verify their sources and control access to sensitive information on a need-to-know basis, along with ways to categorize different types of information as it is passed upward in the group, in order to help ensure it was used effectively.⁷⁸

Because of the sensitivity of intelligence knowledge—information on sources’ identities, specific methods of gathering critical information, and so on—training new operatives can be difficult. “Intelligence underground . . . rarely leaves records, even for those next in command. Nearly everyone involved prefers to know as little as possible, forego records in return for increased security, and forget as much as possible.”⁷⁹ This need and propensity for secrecy made it more difficult for the group to broadly develop intelligence collection capacity.

Although collection of intelligence is critical for a terrorist organization to act effectively, without effective counterintelligence practices a group is highly vulnerable to the actions of law enforcement or security forces. For PIRA, counterintelligence and operational security practices were included in *The Green Book* and covered as part of initial training for new Volunteers. Topics covered included teaching new group members to avoid activities that would lead the police to conclude they were Republican sympathizers, warning them of the dangers of drink-induced talk, and providing methods to help them withstand interrogation.⁸⁰ The explicit lessons on counterinterrogation techniques were reinforced with simulated interrogations so individuals would become familiar with what to expect.⁸¹ The discussion of counterinterrogation in the manual ends with the succinct: “In conclusion, if and when arrested: SAY NOTHING, SIGN NOTHING, SEE NOTHING, HEAR NOTHING.”⁸²

PIRA also taught its members techniques and practices intended to blunt the security force’s use of forensic science to investigate the group’s operations. As the police applied more and more advanced forensic techniques to identify PIRA members and investigate the scenes of attacks, the group developed resources to help its members “break the forensic link to incriminating chemical [and other] residue”⁸³ tying them to an attack. These included manuals that taught ways to counter law-enforcement efforts aimed at the group: “The IRA, with customary thoroughness, debriefed Volunteers who had gone through the process of detection and trial and produced a 9,000 word document whose title could have been ‘How Not to Incriminate Yourself.’”⁸⁴ The document describes police procedures during evidence collection and provides Volunteers with advice on minimizing

the collection of incriminating evidence in their hair; avoiding and removing gunpowder residues; addressing contamination during explosives manufacture; and minimizing risks from fiber, particle, DNA, and footprint evidence.⁸⁵ Some measures that PIRA took, which became a part of the group's overall image—such as the use of rubber gloves and their iconic balaclava facemasks—were partially aimed at reducing vulnerability to many forensic techniques.⁸⁶

Because of the nature of intelligence and counterintelligence activities, objective measures of the effectiveness of a group's training efforts in these areas are even more difficult to develop than for training in more direct military activities. Successes provide anecdotal evidence of effectiveness. For example, PIRA was successful in penetrating some government organizations to help identify targets, gain information, and provide the group warning of security force actions.⁸⁷ However, sometimes successes occur by luck rather than skill and, in areas where groups on all sides of a conflict frequently endeavor to hide both their successes and failures, sufficient data to distinguish the two will seldom be available. In counterintelligence and counterforensic activities, the ability of group members to avoid arrest and successful prosecution are clear measures of effectiveness. Information on some parts of PIRA can provide useful insights and suggests that the group's efforts were effective. One example is seen in the South Armagh unit mentioned previously: "This system meant that there were fewer mistakes and therefore fewer arrests in South Armagh than in any other IRA Brigade area."⁸⁸ Similarly, the assessment by members of the security forces of the effectiveness of the group's counterefforts—and how much they were forced to adapt as a result—also suggest that the group was successful in these areas.⁸⁹

Conclusions

Over its lengthy operational history, the Provisional Irish Republican Army developed a variety of systems for training its Volunteers in the ways of clandestine warfare. Extrapolating from PIRA's experience, several lessons can be drawn relevant to training by terrorist groups more generally:

- Beginning from a raw recruit, any training—whether transmitting political, organizational, or operational knowledge—is beneficial. The resource constraints for providing such training are minimal.
- A sufficient amount of sanctuary, such as PIRA's provided by the Republic of Ireland, provides better opportunities for realistic and more thorough training, especially for sophisticated weaponry and tactics. However, the specific characteristics of a group's safe haven and available resources will define and may constrain its options.

- Terrorist groups need specialists to provide the expertise needed for specific advanced operations and tasks because even large, well-established groups lack the resources to teach all members every potentially important skill. Groups will need mechanisms to identify potentially promising members for specialized training, and mechanisms to subsequently provide it.
- Cross-training among cells within a group can provide a mechanism for knowledge diffusion throughout an organization, but it does so at a price—such training reduces the security benefits that would come from a tightly compartmented, cellular structure.
- Intelligence and counterintelligence capacities of groups are particularly important. It may only take one mistake by a group member to provide law enforcement or intelligence agencies the opening they need to compromise a terrorist operation or the group itself. To the extent these skills can be provided to group members, an organization can significantly bolster its own survivability.
- In all areas, connections with outside groups or experts can be useful to a terrorist organization—but only if those links are close enough to provide current and useful knowledge support and if the assistance provided to the group is relevant to its operational context.

However, while overarching statements about group training are straightforward to make, understanding the operational relevance of terrorist groups' training programs requires the right information to gauge their actual effectiveness. From the perspective of an outside analyst, a group's training efforts are only of real concern if they are effective. The case of PIRA, a group with a long operational history compared to other groups, and to which considerable analytical attention has been paid, underscores the difficulty of this task: While descriptive information on training is comparatively available—in sources ranging from group publications, manuals, and accounts of group members—the data needed to assess efficacy is much more sparse. In some cases, such as elements of the group's military activities, information is available to assess some elements of group training efforts. Improvements in marksmanship and the group's skills in using explosive devices can be ascribed, at least in part, to the effectiveness of its training efforts. In others, such as initial recruit indoctrination, one can infer that the group felt its training program was successful because of its relative stability over time, though an internal perception of effectiveness does not necessarily mean the effort can be judged effective by external, objective measures. The information needed to assess training in other areas is simply not readily available. As such, beyond providing an example of how to assess a group's training efforts in some areas, PIRA also provides insights into the types of information required to more completely and successfully assess a group's training programs.

Acknowledgments

This project was supported in part by Grant No. 2003-IJ-CX-1022, awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.