

# Real Irish Republican Army

## AT A GLANCE

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## HOW TO CITE

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## SUMMARY

**Formed:** 1997

**Disbanded:** 2012. The Real IRA announced a merger with three other dissident republican groups in 2012. The four groups merged to form the New IRA, which is still active as of 2019. On July 26, 2012, the Real IRA announced that its organization ceased to exist.<sup>1</sup>

**First Attack:** May 9, 1998: A dissident republican group carried out a bombing on the Royal Ulster Constabulary station in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland. The militants were suspected members of the newly formed Real IRA. The blast resulted in no injuries (0 killed, 0 wounded).<sup>2</sup>

**Last Attack:** August 3, 2010: Real IRA militants forced a taxi driver to drive a 200-pound bomb to a police station in Derry, Northern Ireland. The bomb exploded, causing significant damage to the building and resulted in no casualties (0 killed, unknown wounded).<sup>3</sup>

## OVERVIEW

The Real Irish Republican Army (Real IRA, or rIRA) was a republican militant group that operated during and after the Troubles in Northern Ireland. It was formed in 1997 after militants opposing peace negotiations split from the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA).<sup>4</sup> The rIRA followed an extremist republican ideology; the group justified its use of violence with the 1919 Irish Declaration of Independence, which claimed the island of Ireland was an independent, sovereign nation<sup>5</sup> The group had cells throughout Ireland and Northern Ireland, and it carried out attacks in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and England. The rIRA's ultimate goals were to disrupt peace negotiations in Northern Ireland, secure a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland, and reunite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland.<sup>6</sup> The Real IRA mounted its largest attack in 1998, and it engaged in hundreds of smaller attacks in the years after, including bombings, shootings, and kidnappings. In 2012, the Real IRA merged with three other dissident republican groups to form the New IRA.<sup>7</sup>

## NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The Real Irish Republican Army (Real IRA, or rIRA) was formed in 1997 as a splinter group of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA).<sup>8</sup> The Provisional IRA was one of the most active republican

militant groups during the Troubles, an ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland during the late 20th century. During this period, republican Catholic militants fought with unionist Protestant militants over the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. Republican dissidents believed Northern Ireland should be united with the Republic of Ireland and considered the British government to be an illegal occupying force. In contrast, unionists sought for Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom. The conflict left approximately 3,600 people dead over several decades.<sup>9</sup>

After decades of waging terrorist campaigns against unionist targets, PIRA sued for peace in the late 1990s. PIRA leadership officially announced a ceasefire and began negotiating with the British government in July 1997.<sup>10</sup> Following the ceasefire, PIRA held a conference in County Donegal to discuss the direction of the organization. At the conference, PIRA Quartermaster General Michael McKevitt denounced the group's leadership and their decision to sue for peace. McKevitt resigned from his PIRA leadership role following the conference in October 1997.<sup>11</sup> In November, McKevitt, his wife, and dozens of ex-PIRA members who wished to continue fighting formed a new organization called Óglaigh na hÉireann, later nicknamed by the media the 'Real IRA' (rIRA).

As the rIRA began recruiting members and acquiring weapons, the political group 32 County Sovereignty Movement (32CSM) emerged in December 1997.<sup>12</sup> The group shared similar goals and ideology as the rIRA, and it defined itself as a 'political pressure group' devoted to removing British forces from Northern Ireland. One of the senior figures in the group was Bernadette Sands McKevitt, wife of Real IRA founder Michael McKevitt and sister of IRA 'martyr' Bobby Sands, who died on a prison hunger strike in 1981.<sup>13</sup> Members of 32CSM claimed to have no association with the rIRA, though many media and government outlets designated the rIRA as the armed wing of the 32CSM.<sup>14</sup> The exact connection between the two groups remains unclear. However, given the groups similar leadership, goals, and history, it is likely they had a close relationship.

On April 10, 1998, the political parties of Northern Ireland and Britain signed the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), which most historians mark as the end of the Troubles. The agreement created the Northern Irish Assembly, a governing body meant to make decisions previously made by the British government in London. This new government would allow power to be shared between unionists and nationalists.<sup>15</sup> While Irish republican political party Sinn Féin and the PIRA acknowledged the agreement, rIRA members viewed the GFA as intolerable. In response, rIRA published a manifesto with its principles in May 1998.<sup>16</sup> The group first rejected the PIRA's non-violent ceasefire agreement instituted 1997 and the GFA of 1998. Second, the rIRA objected to the partition of Ireland into Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Lastly, the group called for the removal of the British presence from Northern Ireland.

rIRA carried out several smaller bombings in the first half of 1998, none of which resulted in any casualties.<sup>17</sup> On August 15, 1998, the rIRA carried out the Omagh Bombing, which resulted in the greatest single loss of life in the Troubles.<sup>18</sup> rIRA militants set off a 500-pound car bomb in Omagh, Northern Ireland, killing 29 civilians. After taking ownership of the attack, the rIRA claimed that the civilian deaths were accidental and maintained that there was supposed to have been a warning sent to authorities to clear the streets.<sup>19</sup>

National backlash after the bombing was swift and immediate. Both Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA issued condemnations of the attack.<sup>20</sup> Public outrage was so strong that Real IRA leader Michael McKevitt and his wife Bernadette Sands McKevitt were forced to move from their home in Dundalk Bay.<sup>21</sup> Three days after the attack, the rIRA announced that it had suspended all military operations. The group stated that it believed the continuation of its campaign in the face of the Omagh bombing was 'futile.'<sup>22</sup>

The rIRA's ceasefire did not last long. Soon after the Omagh bombing, the group began recruiting members and setting up training camps. In October 1999, Garda – the police service of Ireland – raided a training camp in County Meath and arrested ten suspected rIRA members.<sup>23</sup> Following the Omagh bombing, the rIRA no longer targeted civilian centers in Northern Ireland. Instead, it began to target symbols of British military and political power.<sup>24</sup> In September 2000, the rIRA carried out a missile attack on the headquarters of British intelligence agency MI6 in London.<sup>25</sup> No casualties were reported, although the building suffered significant structural damage. In March 2001, rIRA militants bombed the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) headquarters in London, injuring one and inflicting damage on the buildings.<sup>26</sup> Following the BBC bombing, the rIRA released its first public statement in years to mark the 85th anniversary of the Easter Uprising in Dublin. The statement lamented, “Partition has failed and those who attempt to uphold it will fail. As for republicans, we will continue to attack the problem at its root and make no apology for undertaking this necessary task.”<sup>27</sup> A month after the released statement, the United States designated the Real IRA as a foreign terrorist organization.<sup>28</sup>

In August 2002, the rIRA killed its first victim since the Omagh bombing. A Protestant civilian worker died from an explosion targeting a British military base in Derry, Northern Ireland.<sup>29</sup> In the year following the attack, the rIRA experienced significant turmoil. In October 2002, dozens of rIRA militants in prison released a statement calling for the organization to disband.<sup>30</sup> In 2003, rIRA leader Michael McKevitt was tried and found guilty of ‘directing terrorism and membership in an illegal organization’. He was sentenced to twenty years in prison.<sup>31</sup> McKevitt’s arrest caused the organization to fall into disarray, as it lacked leadership and structure. Over the next several years, individual militants arranged several hoax bombings and killed a suspected ex-Sinn Fein informer, but did not engage in any major attacks.<sup>32</sup>

In September 2005, multiple republican militant groups (including PIRA) agreed to give up their weapons stockpiles and continue their non-violent approach towards peace in Northern Ireland. rIRA was one of only two republican groups that refused to take part in the disarmament, the other being the Continuity IRA.<sup>33</sup>

In November 2007, the rIRA announced it would start targeting the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). That month, it carried out two separate attacks against the PSNI, injuring several officers.<sup>34</sup> In 2008, rIRA leaders publicized that the group was about to launch a new campaign of attacks in Northern Ireland. Shortly after the announcement, the rIRA attacked and injured a PSNI officer in May 2008.<sup>35</sup> In 2009, rIRA gunmen attacked military barracks in County Antrim, killing two soldiers and wounding four others.<sup>36</sup> This was their largest attack since the Omagh Bombing in 1998.

In 2009, a splinter group called Oglagh na hEireann (translated to “soldiers of Ireland”) broke off from the Real IRA. The splinter allegedly occurred after disagreements arose between rIRA leadership and former rIRA leader Michael McKevitt.<sup>37</sup> These disagreements arose because older rIRA leadership claimed newer rIRA members were “more interested in criminality as opposed to fighting the crown forces”. After its formation, Oglagh na hEireann pledged allegiance to McKevitt. It is uncertain what exact role McKevitt played in the organization. Although McKevitt was in imprisoned at the time of the split, his former trusted aide allegedly had control of the faction.<sup>38</sup> The split severely weakened the Real IRA.

From 2010 to 2012, the rIRA struggled to organize any major attacks. It carried out occasional punishment shootings, killing several ex-rIRA members and murdering prominent drug criminals that the rIRA claimed were endangering their communities.<sup>39</sup> Despite these attacks, the prominence of the organization diminished severely during this time. In 2011, the Independent Monitoring Commission (the international body established to monitor military activity in Northern Ireland) stated in its report that the rIRA had “gone out of business as a paramilitary group.”<sup>40</sup> While some individual members were still active, the rIRA lacked any real organizational structure and leadership.

In 2012, the rIRA announced its plan to merge with three other dissident republican groups to form the 'New IRA.' The other groups joining the merger were Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD), an east Tyrone republican group, and a group of previously non-aligned republican dissidents from Belfast.<sup>41</sup> In a released statement, the group claimed that the Irish people had continually "been sold a phoney peace." The group also called for the removal of British military and political interference from the country.<sup>42</sup> Government officials estimated that the New IRA had between 250-300 members at the time of its inception. On July 26, 2012, the Real IRA announced that the organization ceased to exist.<sup>43</sup> All former rIRA members had either joined the New IRA or resigned from the organization.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

### A. LEADERSHIP

**Michael McKeivitt** (1997 to 2003): Michael McKeivitt was the Quartermaster General of the Provisional IRA (PIRA) until 1997. He served in the role for fourteen years, overseeing the group's arms stockpile, collection, and movement.<sup>44</sup> He left the Provisional IRA to form the Real IRA (rIRA) in November 1997. McKeivitt and other PIRA members left the group because they disagreed with PIRA's decision to support a ceasefire and endorse the Good Friday Agreement (GFA).<sup>45</sup> Under McKeivitt's leadership, the rIRA rejected the legitimacy of the GFA and continued to carry out terrorist attacks throughout Ireland and the United Kingdom. The most prominent attack occurred in Omagh in August 1998, in which a car bomb killed 29 civilians.<sup>46</sup> In 2003, McKeivitt was sentenced to twenty years in prison for his involvement with the Omagh bombing. While in prison, he lost control of the rIRA and his involvement in the organization dwindled. McKeivitt has always claimed that he played no role in the Omagh bombing and insists that both Irish and British authorities are aware of this. He was released early from prison in 2016.<sup>47</sup> As of 2019, McKeivitt was reported to be sick with terminal cancer.<sup>48</sup>

**Liam Campbell** (1997 to unknown): Liam Campbell served as the rIRA's Director of Operations.<sup>49</sup> Before joining the rIRA, he was involved in dissident republican terrorist acts throughout Northern Ireland in the 1980s. Campbell served as a member of the rIRA leadership and the rIRA's Army Council at the time of the Omagh bombing.<sup>50</sup> In 2000, he was arrested in Co Meath, Ireland for his involvement with the organization and was jailed for five years.<sup>51</sup> In 2009, a disagreement between older and newer rIRA leadership over the direction of the organization drove Campbell to help establish Oglagh na hEireann. Though led by Campbell, this splinter group pledged allegiance to Michael McKeivitt.<sup>52</sup> Soon after, Campbell was imprisoned for four years from 2009 to 2013 for his alleged role in the Omagh bombing.<sup>53</sup> As of 2017, Campbell was fighting extradition charges to Lithuania. From 2006-2007, Campbell attempted to procure weapons for the rIRA through Lithuanian arms dealers.<sup>54</sup>

**Alan Ryan** (1997 to 2012): Alan Ryan led the Dublin faction of the Real IRA until his death in 2012. Ryan was involved with the rIRA since its foundation. After the Omagh bombing, he helped lead a training camp for republican dissidents in County Meath. In 1999, he was arrested at age nineteen for his leadership role in the camp. He was sentenced to four years in prison, after which he returned to rIRA. In 2012, Ryan was murdered by Irish drug gangs over a lasting feud between the two organizations.

**Joe O'Connor** (unknown to 2000): Joe O'Connor was the rIRA commander in Belfast and was also involved with the 32-County Sovereignty Movement. During his time in the rIRA, he engaged in welfare work for rIRA prisoners.<sup>55</sup> He was shot and killed in Belfast in 2000 by suspected members of the Provisional IRA.

## B. NAME CHANGES

- 1997: The Real IRA originally formed under the name Óglaigh na hÉireann.<sup>56</sup> The group quickly acquired the nickname ‘The *Real* IRA’ through the media. The Real IRA should not be confused with the current group Óglaigh na hÉireann, which formed as a splinter group from the rIRA in 2009.<sup>57</sup>
- Many media and government organizations define the 32-County Sovereignty Movement as the political wing of the rIRA and thus as synonymous with the organization.<sup>58</sup> Other sources believe the two groups have an association but operate independently.<sup>59</sup>

## C. SIZE ESTIMATE

- 1998: 100-200 members (Ulster University)<sup>60</sup>
- 2008: 100 members (U.S. State Department)<sup>61</sup>
- 2008: 80 members (MI5)<sup>62</sup>
- 2012: 50 paramilitary members, 50 external supporters and family members (Garda)<sup>63</sup>

## D. RESOURCES

The Real IRA raised funds through a variety of methods. The group historically smuggled tobacco and diesel into Northern Ireland and England from other parts of Europe. In 2006, three rIRA members were arrested in Spain for attempting to smuggle cigarettes back to the United Kingdom.<sup>64</sup> The rIRA also received donations from people around the United Kingdom and abroad.<sup>65</sup> Irish-Americans sympathetic towards the republican movement were historically the primary donors for IRA splinter groups.<sup>66</sup> Garda estimated that just five years after it was founded, rIRA had raised 40 million pounds from smuggling and donors, more than enough to fund its activities.<sup>67</sup> More recently, rIRA resorted to other tactics to raise funds, such as robbing a number of banks throughout the United Kingdom.<sup>68</sup>

rIRA reportedly obtained much of its weapons stockpiles from weapons dumps previously used by the Provisional IRA (PIRA).<sup>69</sup> Following its decision to demilitarize in the late 1990s, the PIRA discarded hundreds of its weapons in dumps around Northern Ireland and Ireland. The rIRA stole rifles, machine guns, and pistols from these dumps.<sup>70</sup> The rIRA also engaged in arms deals with several international organizations. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) or militants from Libya funded many republican groups throughout the Troubles.<sup>71</sup> However, government policies following the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) forced rIRA militants to diversify their sources. In the early 2000, rIRA turned to the former Republic of Yugoslavia to procure weapons, where a black market arms trade had grown from the recent civil war.<sup>72</sup> The Real IRA often worked with the Albanian and Croatian mafia to procure weapons and ship across the Adriatic sea. For example, rIRA obtained a Russian-made rocket-propelled grenade launcher used to attack the MI6 headquarters in London from Croatia.<sup>73</sup> The rIRA also access to a substantial amount of Semtex, a material used in high explosives.<sup>74</sup>

After PIRA announced its ceasefire in 1997, many PIRA members left the organization to join the rIRA.<sup>75</sup> The rIRA used a variety of other methods to attract additional recruits. After the 1998 Omagh bombing, the group set up training camps in Northern Ireland to train new members. When Garda raided a camp in 1999, it was shocked to see the number of teenagers that the militant group had attracted.<sup>76</sup> The rIRA also used social media websites to encourage teenagers to join the republican struggle in Northern Ireland. Websites like Bebo had social groups with titles such as “Support the Dissidents” with hundreds of teenagers in them.<sup>77</sup> Social media and other networking succeeded in recruiting young militants. For example, a 17-year-old boy was arrested in 2009 for the murder of an Irish Policeman, an act inspired by the rIRA.<sup>78</sup>

## E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

**Disclaimer:** This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

After its foundation, rIRA's headquarters were reportedly located in Dundalk, County Louth, Ireland. rIRA leader Michael McKeivitt and his wife, Bernadette Sands McKeivitt, also lived near this town.<sup>79</sup> However, public outrage was so large after the 1998 Omagh bombing that the couple was forced to move away from their home and print-business in Dundalk.<sup>80</sup> It is unclear after 1998 if rIRA ever established another geographic headquarters. In 2009, it was reported that the majority of rIRA members were in areas such as Derry, South Armagh, and South Down.<sup>81</sup>

The rIRA eventually grew to set up cells across multiple locations in the United Kingdom, including Dublin, Belfast, and London.<sup>82</sup> The rIRA historically attacked military targets across London and Northern Ireland. Although rIRA engaged in tobacco and arms deals with groups in several other European countries, it did not establish any cells outside of the UK.

## STRATEGY

### A. IDEOLOGY & GOALS

The Real IRA was a republican dissident group that adhered closely to the Irish Republicanism associated with the original IRA. As a republican group, the rIRA's ultimate goal was to achieve the unity and independence of Ireland.<sup>83</sup> The Real IRA was also associated with the Catholic population of Ireland and Northern Ireland. However, traditional Catholic doctrines did not heavily affect the rIRA's decision making. Catholic leaders have spoken out against the activities of the IRA groups, claiming that these organizations were "a perversion of everything the church stood for."<sup>84</sup>

The rIRA had several concrete objectives. rIRA members wanted to see Northern Ireland unite with the Republic of Ireland as one nation. They believed the British presence in Northern Ireland was and has always been illegitimate.<sup>85</sup> As a result, they did not believe in compromising with the unionist population, which advocated for a continued British presence in the North.<sup>86</sup> The rIRA also rejected the principle of a non-violent resolution to the conflict.<sup>87</sup> This resolution, detailed in the 1997 adoption of the Mitchell Principles, formed the basis of ceasefire negotiations for several IRA groups. The rIRA believed that groups who agreed to this ceasefire and other non-violent agreements had betrayed the republican cause.

The rIRA recognized that it did not have the operational capabilities or strength to secure an immediate British withdrawal. It adhered to a long-term strategy with the goal of creating a perceived threat of violence in Northern Ireland. rIRA militants ultimately wanted to prevent the impression of peace and stability in the country. Through continual terrorist threats and attacks, the rIRA hoped to spoil the peace agreement instituted by the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.<sup>88</sup>

### B. POLITICAL ACTIVITY

The Real IRA was heavily affiliated with the 32 County Sovereignty Movement (32CSM). 32CSM was founded in December 1997, one month after the rIRA's foundation.<sup>89</sup> Following Sinn Fein's adoption of the Mitchell Principles in September 1997 – which ensured a non-violent approach to peace in the region – many republican leaders resigned from the organization and formed 32CSM. 32CSM's founder, Bernadette Sands McKeivitt, was the wife of former rIRA leader Michael McKeivitt.<sup>90</sup> 32CSM's split from Sinn Fein is often seen as parallel to the rIRA's split from the PIRA.

32CSM shared many of the same goals as rIRA. In its constitution, 32CSM stated that the group's primary objective was to restore Irish National Sovereignty. The constitution also called for the release of all Irish republican prisoners around the world, the end of Britain's illegal occupation of Northern Ireland,

and the use of “all legitimate means necessary to restore National Sovereignty as declared in the Declaration of Independence 1919.”<sup>91</sup> 32CSM was also a heavy critic of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. They claimed that the agreement was a partitionist solution that would lead to a corrupt state.<sup>92</sup> 32CSM ultimately valued independence over peace in Northern Ireland. Despite being labeled a political group, 32CSM’s constitution explicitly stated it was not a political organization. The group did not participate in elections. Instead, it engaged in council meeting, community organizing, lobbying and protests.<sup>93</sup>

32CSM was considered by many to be the political associate of the rIRA. Both the British and American governments believed that the two organizations were indistinguishable. The U.S. State Department designated 32CSM as a terrorist organization in 2001 for its affiliation with the rIRA.<sup>94</sup> At one point, rIRA leader Michael McKeivitt confided to an FBI agent that all original 32CSM members were “were all military people... put there for that purpose to keep army politics in the hands of the military.”<sup>95</sup> 32CSM strongly contested the claim that it was the political wing of the rIRA and dismissed suggestions that it affiliated itself with any terror groups. 32CSM strongly condemned the 1998 Omagh attack, stating that the killing of innocent civilians could never be justified.

Outside of its affiliation with the 32CSM, the rIRA did not involve itself in any type of formal politics. However, the group often publicized strong political beliefs. The rIRA stated that it strongly opposed gay marriage and abortion. It also criticized Sinn Fein for its relaxed and ‘anti-Catholic’ position on the subject.<sup>96</sup> The rIRA was previously involved in protests arranged by Reclaim the Streets (RTS), a historic anti-capitalist group based in London.<sup>97</sup>

### **C. TARGETS AND TACTICS**

The Real IRA used bombings, homemade explosives, gun attacks, kidnappings, armed robbery, and punishment shootings to achieve its goals.<sup>98</sup> After its founding, the rIRA sought to attack Northern Ireland’s economic infrastructure as a means of protesting the peace agreement. The group set off car bombs in town centers and in front of court houses.<sup>99</sup> In August 1998, a rIRA car bomb killed 29 people in Omagh, Northern Ireland. Despite the significant casualty level, the rIRA had not intended to kill civilians; the bomb was meant to explode outside of the town courtyard, but botched communication on the intended location of the car led to the crucial mistake.<sup>100</sup>

Following the incident, the rIRA moved away from bombing economic infrastructure and towns. Instead, the group focused on targeting British security forces and Northern Irish policemen.<sup>101</sup> The rIRA often attacked police stations, army barracks, and members of the military in Northern Ireland. The group used homemade mortars, explosives, and landmines to inflict damage on security forces. The rIRA’s efforts were largely ineffectual, only injuring or killing a handful of policemen and military members over the last two decades. The rIRA’s efforts were often been spoiled by Garda, MI6, or FBI informants.<sup>102</sup>

Aside from targeting police forces, the rIRA threatened other communities and groups in Northern Ireland. The rIRA often threatened Protestant communities in Belfast and other towns.<sup>103</sup> The rIRA fashioned itself as a protector against crime, and it regularly engaged in hunt and kill missions aimed at local criminals and drug dealers.<sup>104</sup> In Dublin, rIRA militants fought drug dealers for years. The Dublin-rIRA leader Alan Ryan was gunned down by a crime boss in 2012 for his interference in the drug business.<sup>105</sup> Despite fighting against the criminal world, the rIRA participated in criminal activities itself. rIRA members were known to rob banks and smuggle cigarettes into Northern Ireland.<sup>106</sup>

The rIRA also targeted and killed PIRA, ex-rIRA, and Sinn Fein members over ideological and organizational disagreements.<sup>107</sup>

## MAJOR ATTACKS

**Disclaimer:** These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

**May 9, 1998:** A dissident republican group carried out a bombing on the Royal Ulster Constabulary station in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland. The militants were suspected members of the newly formed Real IRA. The blast resulted in no injuries (0 killed, 0 wounded).<sup>108</sup>

**August 15, 1998:** The rIRA set off a car bomb in the town of Omagh, Northern Ireland. The bomb killed 29 civilians and wounded hundreds of others. After the bombing, national and international backlash overwhelmed rIRA, prompting the group to announce a ceasefire three days after the bombing.<sup>109</sup> The casualty level was apparently the result of botched planning and poor communication.<sup>110</sup> The Omagh bombing was the greatest single loss of life during the Troubles<sup>111</sup> (29 killed, 200+ injured).<sup>112</sup>

**September 20, 2000:** rIRA militants fired missiles at the MI6 headquarters in London. The attack caused significant structural damage to the intelligence agency but resulted in no casualties (0 killed, 0 wounded).<sup>113</sup>

**February 21, 2001:** rIRA militants set off an explosive device at a military base in west London. A 14-year old cadet was injured from the attack (0 killed, 1 wounded).<sup>114</sup>

**March 4, 2001:** The rIRA set off a bomb outside the British Broadcasting Channel (BBC) in London. The militants warned officials of the bomb to ensure no civilians were harmed (0 killed, 0 wounded).<sup>115</sup>

**August 1, 2002:** The rIRA set off an explosive device at an army base outside of Derry, Northern Ireland. David Caldwell, a civilian construction worker, was killed by the explosion (1 killed, 0 wounded).<sup>116</sup>

**April 4, 2006:** The rIRA shot and killed Denis Donaldson, a former Sinn Fein member, at his home. Donaldson had just been expelled from Sinn Fein after it was revealed he had been a British intelligence informant for nearly two decades (1 killed, 0 wounded).<sup>117</sup>

**November 2007:** After announcing a campaign targeting policemen in Northern Ireland, rIRA militants shot and injured two policemen in November of 2007 (0 killed, 2 wounded).<sup>118</sup>

**March 7, 2009:** rIRA militants attacked military barracks in County Antrim. The militants murdered two soldiers and wounded four others. This attack was the largest the group had carried out since the Omagh bombing (2 killed, 4 wounded).<sup>119</sup>

**February 24, 2010:** The rIRA carried out a punishment shooting against one of its own members in Derry. The organization claimed that the member had been involved in drug dealing. The community of Derry reacted harshly against the rIRA, hosting a rally after the shooting and condemning the group (1 killed, 0 injured).<sup>120</sup>

## INTERACTIONS

### A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

- U.S. State Department: May 16, 2001<sup>121</sup>



- The United Kingdom: In the 2000 Terrorist Act, the United Kingdom designated any dissident group operating under the name ‘IRA’ as a terrorist organization.<sup>122</sup>

## **B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

The Real IRA lacked support among civilians in Northern Ireland. The 1998 Omagh bombing tarnished the rIRA’s reputation among Irish Catholics, a population from which the group was trying to elicit support. Nearly half of the 29 victims killed were Catholic.<sup>123</sup> Public outrage from republicans and unionists alike immediately followed the attack. The outrage was so significant that rIRA leader Michael McKevitt and his wife were forced to leave their home and close their business.<sup>124</sup>

After the bombing, the rIRA began to target police and military institutions instead of civilian centers.<sup>125</sup> However, rIRA never gained any substantial sympathy or support from citizens in Northern Ireland. In 2002, support for the Good Friday Agreement reached its lowest levels since the document’s adoption. In response, the BBC ran a poll to understand the shifting political views of people in Northern Ireland. In those surveys, only 3.3 percent of the nationalist community claimed that 32CSM – the political associate of the rIRA – best represented their views. In 2006, that number dropped 1 percent.<sup>126</sup> Civilians generally regard the rIRA as an irrelevant, extremist group.

In 2009, the Northern Irish Police Service found evidence that the rIRA was gaining pockets of support among Irish teenagers. The rIRA had begun to recruit young teenagers through social media websites by forming republican dissident chat groups. Social websites like Bebo were found to have group chats with titles such “Support the Dissidents” with hundreds of active teenagers members.<sup>127</sup>

## **C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS**

The Real IRA had a complicated relationship with the Provisional IRA (PIRA). The PIRA was one of the most active republican militant groups during the Troubles. In 1997, the PIRA signed on to the Mitchell Principles, agreeing to only use non-violent methods to reach a compromise in Northern Ireland.<sup>128</sup> However, many within the PIRA disagreed with this decision and chose to resign from the organization. Some of these ex-members went on to help found the rIRA; in fact, some sources suggest almost all of the founding members of the rIRA were previously affiliated with the PIRA.<sup>129</sup> British security forces also believe the rIRA received covert backing and support from members of the PIRA who had not severed their links with the organization.<sup>130</sup>

After the 1998 Omagh bombing, the PIRA became increasingly critical and hostile towards the rIRA.<sup>131</sup> In 2000, the PIRA carried out a punishment shooting against a suspected the rIRA member in Belfast.<sup>132</sup> The two groups continued to engage in minor tit-for-tat shootings and attacks in the years following. In 2005, the PIRA announced it had formally ended its armed campaign and began the process of demilitarizing. Since then, conflict between the PIRA and the rIRA has decreased.

Since its founding, the rIRA had a close relationship with the Continuity IRA (CIRA). The CIRA formed as a splinter group from the PIRA in 1986 with the similar goal of fighting to unite Ireland.<sup>133</sup> When the PIRA agreed to the Mitchell Principles in 1997, the CIRA and the rIRA became the only two major republican militant groups still active in Northern Ireland. The CIRA and the rIRA are believed to have collaborated in several attacks.<sup>134</sup> CIRA militants were also allegedly involved in the 1998 Omagh bombing.<sup>135</sup> In 2012, the rIRA announced its plan to merge with three other dissident republican groups into the New IRA. The CIRA, however, chose not to join this merger, signaling that the rIRA and the CIRA contain separate leadership and follow different strategies.<sup>136</sup>

In the early 2000s, the rIRA engaged in arms deals with several mafia groups from the former Republic of Yugoslavia. (See the Resources section for more information.) The rIRA also had a close relationship with the 32 County Sovereignty Movement. (See the Political Activity section for more information.)

#### D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

The Real IRA was not supported or funded by any foreign government. Garda (the police service of the Republic of Ireland), the Northern Irish Police Service, MI5, and the FBI have all engaged in efforts to infiltrate the rIRA and arrest its members.

#### MAPS

- Ireland

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