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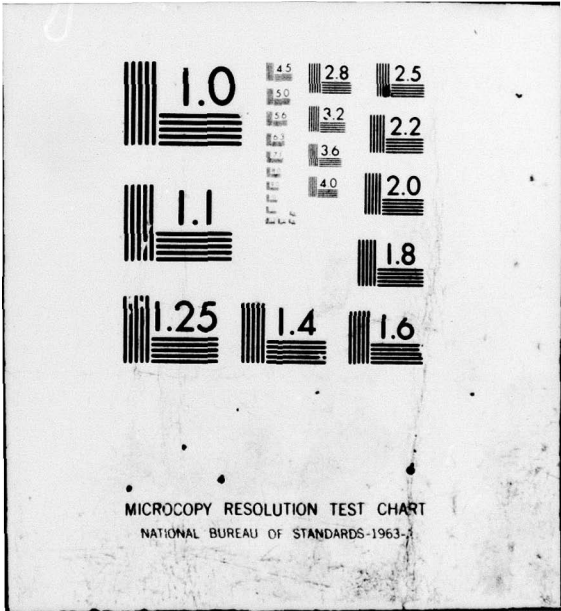
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Comments by Dr. J. Bowyer Bell, Institute of War and Peace Studies, Columbia University on a Paper Presented by Dr. Brian Jenkins, Rand Corporation, at Session III of the Department of State Conference on International Terrorism, March 26, 1976,

⑩ J. Bowyer Bell ⑪ 1976

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Since Brian Jenkins has given a quite splendid overview of nearly all phases of the prospects for terrorism, I thought it might be wise to focus on one specific area in some detail: the problems and prospects involved in weapons technology transfer for the revolutionary-terrorist. The major burden of this comment is that such transfers are not simply the acquisition of a piece of hardware and a consequent increase in revolutionary capacity but rather a more complex process. In point of fact, the procurement of a novel and a more complicated weapon may cause more problems for the revolutionary than it solves. Leaving aside the aspirations of those waging limited wars or rural guerrilla campaigns, I will examine one particular organization - the Belfast Brigade of the Provisional IRA, an organization that would not welcome being discussed in a conference on terrorism. Still, the Provos in Belfast face weapons procurement policies not unlike those of many active revolutionary groups operating without liberated zones or sanctuary.

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In the summer of 1969 communal rioting in Northern Ireland necessitated the intervention of the British army. The other, secret army, the IRA had been noticeable during the disturbances by its absence. The Nationalist population had assumed that such a force existed and in fact so had many Irish Republicans; but after

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the end of the IRA's low-level campaign in 1962, the leadership had turned toward radical politics rather than military adventures. Some of the military men drifted away taking their weapons or the knowledge of dumps with them. Other weapons were lost or stolen or rusted away untended. By 1969 the IRA's armory was a motley of a few dozen Thompson sub-machine guns (some original 1921-models - a fifty-year old weapon), one or two other odd automatic weapons, some military rifles, largely Lee-Enfields, various sporting rifles, including .22s, and all kinds of pistols and revolvers. Ammunition was as varied and often too old to be trustworthy. And very little of this material was in Belfast in 1969. The paucity of military supplies and capacity was a major factor in producing the split of the IRA into the Officials and Provisionals. For the latter the primary responsibility in 1970 was to organize and arm an underground army, especially in the areas of high nationalist vulnerability in Belfast and Derry. In so doing they discovered the sympathetic backing of those in official positions in Dublin.

The first major effort to arm the new nationalist defenders involved members of the Fianna Fail government who turned over funds to agents from Belfast and promised to arrange swift passage for the shipment when it arrived on the Dublin docks. The scheme aborted. The arms dealer turned out to be untrustworthy, the Irish emissaries naive, and the Prime Minister, Jack Lynch, unwilling to ignore the operation. Subsequent Provisional efforts in Europe aborted as well, as a result of British intelligence, duplicity, and Irish incompetence. The failures meant that the Belfast Brigade could only absorb so many volunteers effectively - there were not going to be thousands of

weapons to arm the nationalist population but rather a relatively small urban guerrilla force, adequate to defend pressure points and quite capable of waging a low-intensity campaign against the British army.

The Provisionals, fluctuating in size from two hundred to over a thousand volunteers, were armed largely by scavaging in Ireland and Europe, from the United States, and later with the help of the Libyan government - although the latter source was more visible than viable. There has been a sporadic trickle into Ireland and on to Belfast from these sources but never a flood. All attempts to organize a major shipment have failed. In Europe the major reason is that arms dealers have been willing to risk selling out IRA agents to British intelligence. Some feel that at times the "arms agents" have in fact been British arms agents. The IRA in turn with little experience in substantial, illicit arms transfers has been unwilling to invest in the necessary and expensive certification involved or to spend the essential time in creating the appropriate, legal forms and organization that would make large shipments possible. Instead, from the first the Army Council has preferred to depend on illicit shipments - a good drop means that almost all the money has been spent on arms not on paper. And the great difference since 1969 has been that the IRA has come into flush times. Approximately one million dollars has been funneled from America to the financial officers of the IRA GHQ and much of this has been spent, often vainly, on arms.

The most notorious single shipment, however, cost the IRA little or nothing - although hewing to tradition the arms dropped into the

hands of the Dublin authorities rather than the IRA. Colonel Muammar Qaddafi of Libya, seeing the Provisional IRA as an anti-imperialist force, arranged for both arms and money to be handed over to appropriate representatives. Joe Cahill, the IRA Quartermaster, leased a vessel, the Claudia, picked up the arms, and, carefully trailed by British eyes, sailed off to be met in Irish waters by the Irish navy. Consequently the Belfast Brigade for the last six years has had to depend on the American connection most of the time.

In the early days weapons came into Ireland in golf bags and coffins, were shipped to England and back to Ireland, arrived in crates and disappeared from the docks, slipped by customs at Shannon airport or were transferred to fishing boats. The most effective new weapons to arrive in Belfast were the Colt-AR-15, a semi-automatic civilian version of the M-16, and the AR-180, the Armalite. For IRA purposes both and especially the latter were ideal weapons. Neither is automatic which is not a virtue in untrained hands - and in any conventional sense the IRA volunteer is badly trained. Both are light. The AR-180 with a folding stock can be easily broken down to be transported - "fits in a cornflakebox, it does." The Armalite .223 cartridge can pierce the armor of British personnel carriers and army-issue body armor. The rate of fire gives the inexperienced marksman a chance of hitting the target and is quite appropriate for single-shot urban ambushes. The trajectory is remarkably flat. In sum, the two are ideal urban guerrilla weapons. The only difficulty is that ammunition and replacements must come from America or Germany. These rifles, however, do not really give the IRA a greater capacity than would an M-1 or even

the old Lee-Enfield. Its virtue is that it is easy to use. It must be remembered that most urban guerrillas learn on the job. Very few have fired a shot except in anger. Very few have had any formal military training - and that in the British army. Very few handle weapons with special competence. And the Armalite compensates for incompetence.

Once the level of sophistication is increased the problem of competence becomes more serious. In the autumn of 1972, the IRA at last managed to get a shipment of arms into Ireland that included Russian-made RPG-7 rocket launchers. Now to anyone with an exposure to the military, a bazooka or a PIAT is a quite simple weapon used for obvious purpose. The Belfast Brigade, however, had never been trained to use a launcher. The O/C was not about to send the lads off into the country to practice with the few rockets he had. Instead the RPG-7 was used for IRA purposes rather than in the way the maker had intended. Fired into police stations the armor-piercing rocket zapped in one side and out the other. Although the use of the RPG-7 intrigued the press, the entire exercise proved futile for the IRA; some of the weapons were lost, others went into dumps, and the volunteers went back to rifles and infernal devices. Assuming that the IRA had persisted, the solution would have been to import skilled instructors - the obvious candidates being Irish-American veterans of Vietnam. This has almost always been the only option open to revolutionaries unless the opportunity occurs to send volunteers abroad for short courses. And such "graduates" may introduce other problems along with their new skills; and in any case no one likes to reduce the fighting strength in the midst of a campaign.

The IRA difficulty in absorbing new weaponry is hardly unique. And it is not only hardware that complicates revolutionary life but new tactics and new ideas. The idea of an Armbrust 300 or a portable flamethrower may be as alien as the weapon - that is until someone uses it before the watching eye of television. Mostly, however, the revolutionary who is going to operate on the transnational stage or in major cities can make do quite well with the present generation of weapons. It is easier to destroy an airliner with a conventional altitude bomb in the luggage than to sneak about the airfield with a rocket launcher. It is easier to make your own bombs as do the IRA -although somewhat more dangerous - out of fertilizer and stolen gelatinite than set up a chemical factory. It is easier to blow up the Spanish prime minister with conventional explosives than use a new man-portable, anti-tank weapon. It is certainly a lot easier, if it were desirable, to kill goodly numbers of people with car bombs rather than spend the time and effort devising a low-yield nuclear device. And revolutionaries, like most, prefer the easy life, opt for the conventional response,^{and}/regard innovation, especially if it requires a training course, with suspicion.

Consequently in a world filled with awesome and disturbing possibilities, the problem of weapons transfers to terrorists can be given a minor place. Mostly terrorists kill very few people and those for effect. Perhaps a certain weapon - a flamethrower - will have an exaggerated effect and thus be appealing. Perhaps not. Probably some of the new weapons will appear in a revolutionary arsenal, some may even be used properly; but except for real guerrilla campaigns

such an appearance will not signal a world order any more seriously endangered than at present. It is quite true that the Belfast Brigade would be delighted to have a flame thrower (after all they have to make their mortars out of old plastic drain pipes) especially if delivery were guaranteed, but Sean Cronin as Chief of Staff once noted: "A match may be a guerrilla's most effective weapon."

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