

On Thursday, BBC Newsnight featured an exclusive report based on ICSR's latest publication, ***Return of the Militants: Violent Dissident Republicanism***, by our Associate Fellow, Dr Martyn Frampton.

According to the report, which is released today, the danger posed by groups such as the Real IRA and Continuity IRA is at its greatest level in over a decade, and is likely to increase. In the recent National Strategic Defence and Security Review, 'residual terrorism linked to Northern Ireland' was identified as a Tier One risk to national security. MI5 has also raised the official threat level from dissident republican groups from 'moderate' to 'substantial' and warned against the real possibility of a strike on the British mainland, in addition to the ongoing threat posed to the police, army and security services in Northern Ireland.

Return of the Militants is the most authoritative and comprehensive attempt to address the recent upsurge of violent republicanism to date. It analyses the origins and the nature of the threat posed by violent dissidents, provides a timeline of recent dissident republican activities, and introduces the various groups involved. Drawing on the expert testimony of former security service personnel, the report also examines the changing security environment and evaluates potential responses to the increase of the threat.

The main conclusions of the report are as follows:

- **Growing influence of dissidents.** Dissidents are increasingly assertive in certain 'republican areas' of Northern Ireland: south Fermanagh, Derry city (Bogside and Creggan), south Derry, north Armagh (Lurgan–Craigavon), east Tyrone, south Armagh and Belfast (north and west).
- **Changing power structures in republican areas.** The growth in dissident strength has been paralleled by the retraction and withering of the Provisional IRA in some areas in Northern Ireland, as well as other structures of social support for the broader Provisional movement (Sinn Féin offices, community groups etc.).
- **Dissident capacities remain potent and lethal.** Such groups do not have to go through the same 'learning curve' as many other start-up terrorist groups. There are a number of individuals within their ranks who were involved in the IRA's campaign before 1998 and who retain high levels of operational experience, particularly in explosives.
- **A transformed security apparatus.** The security services have struggled to respond to the challenge posed by violent dissident republicans. Some former senior police officers have identified the existence of a skills-gap, following changes to the policing and security infrastructure since 1998, alongside budgetary cuts.
- **Talking does not provide an easy answer.** It has been suggested that the best way to deal with these groups is to talk to them, as happened with the IRA. However, the *raison d'être* of the dissident movement is to oppose the current political process, and to avoid the traps of negotiation which they believe the leadership of Sinn Féin fell into in the 1990s.

To download a copy of *Return of the Militants*, please visit the ICSR website at www.icsr.info

To watch the Newsnight report click [here](#).

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ICSR, King's College London, 138-142 Strand, London. WC2R 1HH

Phone: +44 (0) 207 848 2065 | Email: mail@icsr.info

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