



More proof of British state terrorism in Ireland

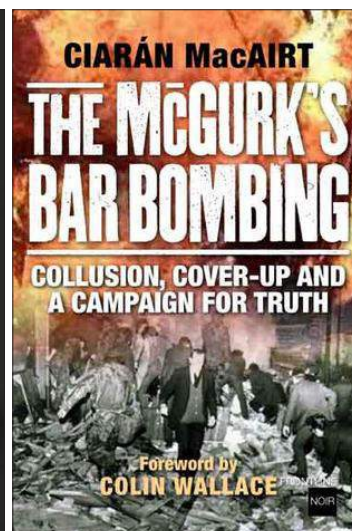
By Richard Bardon and Robert Butler

The British Establishment's account of the thirty years (1968-98) of bloody civil strife in the north of Ireland known as "The Troubles", holds that it was a paramilitary conflict between the Catholic nationalists of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Protestant "loyalist" paramilitaries—coinciding with, but largely separate from the IRA's pre-existing guerrilla war against Britain's military and police forces. As regular AAS readers will know, evidence brought to light in recent years tells a different story. In 2013, author Anne Cadwallader in her book *Lethal Allies: British Collusion in Ireland* proved that London and its loyalist proxies had systematically committed atrocities against civilians on both sides to fan the flames of conflict. Moreover, Republic of Ireland state papers declassified late last year revealed that the British Security Service MI5 deployed the Belfast-based Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) to commit terrorist attacks across the border in the 1970s and '80s (AAS 24 January).

Irish writer and activist Ciarán MacAirt has recently blown more holes in Britain's official story. In his capacity as the founder and manager of Paper Trail (Legacy Archive Research), a registered charity which helps survivors and bereaved families unearth truths hidden in public records, MacAirt has worked for many years to uncover a still-ongoing cover-up surrounding one of the Troubles' bloodiest mass murders, the December 1971 bombing of McGurk's Bar in Belfast. The authorities knew from the outset the attack was perpetrated by the UVF, but lied it was an IRA blunder, which they sneeringly called an "own goal". MacAirt has also proved that already by the time of that bombing, the London and Northern Ireland political elite knew of and condoned the murder of civilians not only by loyalist gangs, but by a special-forces detachment called the Military Reaction Force (MRF),



Irish writer and activist Ciarán MacAirt and the cover of his book. Photo: YouTube



created by the infamous "counter-insurgency" specialist Brigadier Frank Kitson, which operated directly out of the British Army's Northern Ireland headquarters.

McGurk's Bar Massacre

Fifteen men, women and children were killed on the evening of Saturday, 4 December 1971, when UVF terrorists "planted a no-warning bomb on the doorstep of a family-run bar in north Belfast", MacAirt states on the McGurksBar.com campaign website. Made from 23 kilograms (50 lbs) of gelignite, the bomb was so powerful that it collapsed the building. It was the country's worst massacre of civilians since the Nazi "Blitz" of World War II. MacAirt's immediate motivation for investigating the atrocity is personal—one of the victims, Kathleen "Kitty" Irvine, was his grandmother, and he and other members of the McGurk's Bar Families have dedicated their lives to the pursuit of justice for 46 years and two generations.

MacAirt has written a book dealing with the incident, entitled *The McGurk's Bar Bombing: Collusion, Cover-Up and a Campaign for Truth*, whose contents have been used as evidence in several major court cases. The website states that proceeds from its sale go to the families' not-for-profit commemoration group.

Without any evidence, the government, British military and Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC, Northern Ireland's police force of the time) immediately declared the McGurk's Bar bomb an IRA "bomb in transit" which had detonated prematurely—meaning that the victims were IRA members or accomplices who had accidentally blown themselves up. "As the families prepared to bury their loved ones", MacAirt wrote,



McGurk's Bar after the bombing. Photo: mcgurksbar.com

“the State drip-fed black propaganda into the intelligence stream, media and public consciousness.” The official claim ignored eyewitness testimony that the bomb had been planted, moments before it exploded, by a masked man who got out of (and left in) a car with a Union Jack sticker on the rear windscreen. In 2016 the McGurk’s Bar Families secured evidence that the British Military Headquarters had also suppressed a report by British explosives experts, who stated the morning after the attack that the blast had come from outside the building. Even after former UVF member Robert James Campbell was convicted of the bombing in 1978, the “own goal” story was never officially dropped.

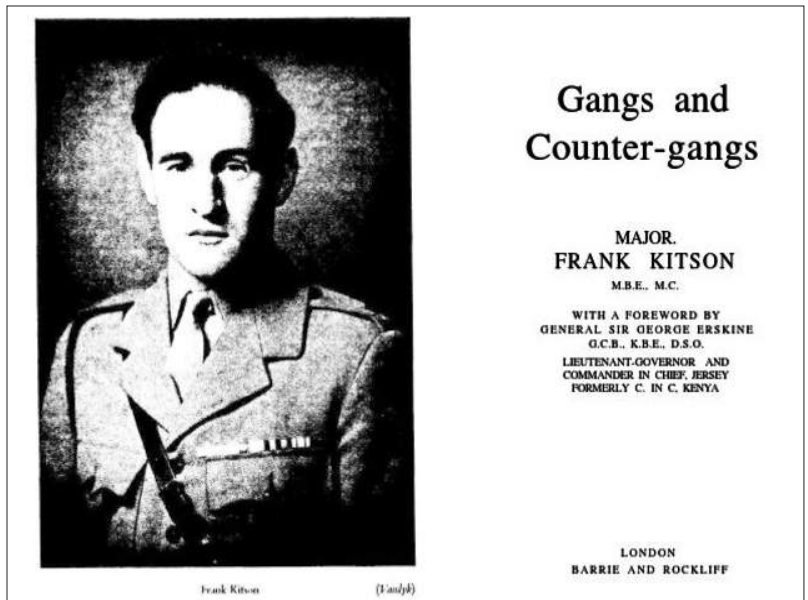
In February 2011, after an investigation sparked by the Families’ complaints, the Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman at last formally acknowledged that the bombing had been committed by “loyalist paramilitaries”, and that the victims were in no way responsible. In December 2017, however, MacAirt wrote that senior officers in the Police Service of Northern Ireland continue to deliberately mislead the Families and the public “in order to protect the reputation of RUC officers who led the cover-up and the identity of British agents in the Loyalist death squad”; and that a barrister for the British Ministry of Defence had been forced to admit that the department was still withholding information, “to protect the identity of an agent/informer”.

‘The MRF and its Director of Terrorism’

In 2014 MacAirt discovered a recently released Home Office file which attached a copy of a paper dated 4 December 1971, the same day as the McGurk’s Bar massacre, entitled “Future Developments in Belfast: by Commander 39 Airborne Brigade”—i.e. Brigadier Frank Kitson, who had been assigned that position in September 1970 and would hold it until February 1972, a crucial juncture in the conflict in which, MacAirt argues, he laid the blue-print for how Britain was to wage its war during and after his tenure.

In a blog post titled “The MRF and its Director of Terrorism”, MacAirt wrote: “Digging for documents in the National Archives in Kew, London, at the start of the year, a ‘personal and confidential’ letter dated 30 December 1971 caught my eye. It was from Howard Smith, Whitehall’s UK Representative in Northern Ireland, to leading civil servant, Philip Woodfield CBE, head of the Northern Ireland department at the Home Office. It began: ‘I think you will be interested to see the enclosed copy of a paper written by Frank Kitson.’ I was very interested as Brigadier Frank Kitson is a renowned author and counter-insurgency expert who was commander of the British Army in Belfast at that time.”

Brigadier (later General) Frank Kitson is universally acknowledged as the post-World War II period’s leading expert on the methods of fanning internecine strife, and even civil war, for the purpose of counterinsurgency—that is, the means by which a rebellious population can be divided against itself, so that it does not unite against the common Imperial enemy. Kitson perfected these techniques—his development of which he chronicled in his books *Gangs and Counter-gangs* (1960) and *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping* (1971)—in murderous British counter-insurgency wars against



Sir Frank Kitson and the title page of his book.

nationalist movements in Kenya, Malaya, Cyprus, Oman and Yemen in the 1950s and '60s. In his December 1971 paper, Kitson decried the “clumsiness” of Northern Ireland’s “Security Force machine”, and recommended a number of changes based on his proven methods. “On our streets”, wrote MacAirt, “this meant he oversaw Britain’s deployment of in-depth interrogation techniques, psychological operations, pseudo-gangs and covert Special Force units who murdered civilians with impunity.” The MRF, formed around a small core group of elite killers from the Special Air Service (SAS) and Parachute Regiment, was one of the latter, and a very important one.

Kitson’s paper opens with the statement that operations in Belfast since 9 August 1971 “have been carried out on the basis of so weakening the IRA that a future political initiative can be launched under favourable circumstances”, but goes on to warn: “It is likely that having fined down the enemy organisations to the extent we have done, future successes will be increasingly hard to achieve from an operational point of view, unless we are able to make our own organisation very much more efficient. As you know *we are taking steps to do this in terms of building up and developing the MRF...*” (emphasis added).

MacAirt wrote that the 1971 paper, the earliest record of the MRF he had found, made clear that the unit was the spearhead of Kitson’s campaign to eliminate the IRA. “We now know from this letter and paper too”, he continued, “that the top brass of the British Army and the cream of Britain’s political class in the north of Ireland at the time also knew of its development and importance. Therefore, they cannot shirk the responsibility for the crimes the MRF carried out with impunity and in Britain’s name.” As he explained in an accompanying two-part podcast, the MRF was guilty of dozens of murders and attempted murders in the early 1970s. The vast majority of its victims were civilians.

Wrote MacAirt, “Lawyers representing the families of civilians murdered by the MRF ... should demand that the [Police] question 88- [now 91-] year-old Brigadier Frank Kitson as the police have done elderly suspects of Loyalist and Republican killings carried out at the same time. Frank Kitson is allegedly as much a director of terrorism as any paramilitary leader, as he records here the development of a clandestine unit at the cutting edge of British military plans which killed ordinary civilians.”