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## PERIPHERY OF WAR OR FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE?

### Ireland Prepares for Invasion (1900–1915)

Ireland's stability was a crucial factor in the security of the United Kingdom prior to the Great War. Concerns were not of a purely military nature, nor were they directed solely toward foreign enemies. Irish domestic social and political issues greatly contributed to the anxiety of the Imperial General Staff and Irish Command. Such issues included Ireland's geographic vulnerability at the edge of Europe, a limited police force, the fidelity of Irish units in the British Army<sup>1</sup>, and a radically politicized, though small, portion of the population. These factors, combined with a tradition of rebellion, painted Ireland as the ideal stage for invasion and subsequent insurrection.

Specific aspects of international law, and growing political discord between Ireland's Protestant and Catholic communities, complemented fears aroused by invasion scenarios during the pre-war period. For instance, successive Hague Conventions had neutralized the role of civilians in a nation's defence, while debate over Home Rule autonomy caused widespread political and religious strife, and a brief mutiny of British Army officers in Ireland in March 1914. Such realities suggested that, on the eve of the Great War, the British Isles were in fact, as Jérôme aan de Wiel has identified, a »dis«united Kingdom<sup>2</sup>.

Ireland indeed played an important role in framing Britain's defence policy prior to the Great War. However, the immediate crises of Home Rule, the planned policy of giving Ireland more autonomy within the United Kingdom, and the paramilitary Ulster and Irish Volunteers, respectively established to oppose and support Home Rule, the Curragh Mutiny, when British officers announced that they would resist the implementation of Home Rule by force and the failure of the Buckingham Palace Conference, the July 1914 attempt to resolve the stalemate in Ireland, only contributed more long-standing concerns. Hypothesising about the origins, geography, and potential belligerents of a future war, the War Office placed considerable weight on the loyalty and social and political stability of Ireland.

This article explores Ireland's role in a possible international conflict during the pre-war period. It examines cultural revival and radical politics as contributing to an overall distrust of Irish society by Britain and France. Moreover, it surveys the legal complexities involving civilian combatants, and addresses the contemporary fear that an exodus of soldiers from Ireland to foreign theatres of combat would expose Britain's flank, and ultimately force it to fight a war on two fronts – perhaps with an Irish fifth column. Overall, this article explores the significance of Ireland in British war planning, assesses certain Irish political and cultural complex-

- 1 Jérôme aan de Wiel has argued that the Boer War had revealed to foreign powers the limits of the British Army, and the untrustworthiness of some of the Irish in its ranks. JÉRÔME AAN DE WIEL, *The Irish Factor 9. Ireland's Strategic and Diplomatic Importance for Foreign Powers*, Dublin 2011, p. 14.
- 2 *Id.*, *The »Irish Factor« in the Outbreak of War in 1914*, in: *History Ireland* 19, no. 4 (July/August 2011), p. 34. See also Andreas ROTH, *Was Ireland a Factor in German Foreign Policy During the July Crisis of 1914?*, in: *The Irish Sword* 20, no. 80 (winter 1996), p. 167–173.

ities that complicated such planning, and analyses the validity of concerns raised about Irish security during the pre-war years.

### Varieties of perceived discontent in Ireland

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the invasion of England not only represented a popular genre of British fiction, it was the subject of several provocative German pamphlets, including »Operationen über See«, published in 1901 by Baron von Edelsheim, and »The Feasibility of Oversea Invasion«, a German editorial response to British naval reports, which appeared the following year in the German naval journal »Marine-Rundschau«<sup>3</sup>. Although it had not openly rebelled since 1867, and Land War agitation had receded, Ireland began to move toward the centre of defence planning in the early twentieth century due to its strategic liability to Britain, and observable discontent, which had re-emerged in the form of pro-Boer nationalist sentiment during the South African War.

A variety of evidence from the period from British, Irish and French sources paint Ireland as both, harmless and dangerous, pacified yet scheming. In this regard, the War Office anticipated that although the native population would not necessarily welcome invasion by a foreign power, it would nevertheless seize upon the opportunity it presented to rebel. The Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, George Cadogan, received two reports to this effect in early November 1898. Each spoke toward the Fenian adage that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity: »Assuming that England were engaged in a war which would severely tax her military resources, it may not unfairly be concluded that disaffected Irishmen would seize the opportunity to give trouble, and that internal disorder would ensue, if the means of checking it were not at once available«<sup>4</sup>.

Not indeed that there is any narrowness about Irish sympathies as regards Nations with whom England might have difficulties, as from time to time America, France, Russia, and even Kalifa have found well-wishers amongst a certain class of Irishmen ... England's difficulty would be welcomed as affording an opportunity for internal disorder, and for carrying out to its extreme limits the policy which has characterized Irish agitation for the last 20 years<sup>5</sup>.

Ireland's stability also influenced international observers. Paul Cambon, French Ambassador to the United Kingdom, was kept informed of events in Ireland, and commented on how public opinion was not wholly representative of political sentiment. For instance, while Cambon observed that although Queen Victoria had been well received in Dublin during a royal visit in 1900, he did not believe such a showing would ease long-standing anti-English passions in Ireland. Following the Entente Cordial, Cambon and others believed that underlying Irish unrest presented a threat to the United Kingdom and, consequently, France<sup>6</sup>.

Local attitudes witnessed during the Boer War helped to strengthen the impression of Irish opportunism. For instance, Sir Andrew Reed, Inspector General of the Royal Irish Constabulary (R.I.C.), reported that several of his officers, in their individual reports, referred to »the

3 See also Editorial on Lord Brassey's »Naval Annual, 1902«, *The Feasibility of Oversea Invasion*, in: *Marine-Rundschau* 6 (1902), p. 727–731, prepared for the Committee on Imperial Defence, c. April 1903 (The National Archives, London [hereafter TNA], WO 106/44).

4 D.H. [David Harrel] to George Cadogan, 5 Nov. 1898 (TNA, CO 904/174).

5 *Ibid.*, 9 Nov. 1898.

6 Paul Cambon to Théophile Delcassé, 12 Mar. 1900 (Quai d'Orsay, ministère des Affaires étrangères, Archives diplomatiques: Grande Bretagne 4). For French outlooks regarding the vulnerability of Ireland see AAN DE WIEL, »France: adieu Fontenoy [...]«, in: *The Irish Factor* (as in n. 1), p. 3–44. Conversely, Lord Grenfell, Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in Ireland, reported that successive visits of the Sovereign had »revived much latent loyalty to the Throne«. Lord Grenfell, Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in Ireland, Cabinet answers to the Prime Minister (Arthur Balfour), 2 Sept. 1905 (TNA, CAB 38/10/74).

disloyal spirit which undoubtedly exists amongst a section of the Nationalist population; and which has been excited by the war in Africa<sup>7</sup>. Kevin O'Shiel provided context for the nationalist sentiment witnessed within his native Ulster during this time. Contrasting the »Great Boer War« with the First World War, he stated: »Whilst general Catholic, or rather Nationalist feeling was sympathetic to the Boers, it was very far indeed from being as strong as was, for example, the feeling in Ireland, in the first months of World War 1 for the Belgians«<sup>8</sup>. Although several hundred Irishmen enlisted in John McBride's Irish Transvaal Brigade during the Boer War, no major upheaval was experienced in Ireland. Nevertheless, many nationalists contemporaneously identified the Boer War as a source of Irish animosity toward Britain<sup>9</sup>.

By 1905, the War Office had concluded its brief, though demanding, campaign against the Boers, and began to conceive the possibility of a major land-based war with several nations. In fact, the Committee on Imperial Defence constructed five war scenarios that would require the deployment of the British Army overseas. They were: a renewed campaign in South Africa, war with France, war in alliance with France against Germany, war with the United States, and war with Russia<sup>10</sup>. In all these cases, Ireland was viewed as a key component of the security of the British Isles, as well as a lynchpin of the wider empire.

In August 1905 the Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, issued a questionnaire to the General Staff regarding the condition of Ireland. Respondents were asked to assess the apparent tranquillity that had visited Ireland since the Boer War and passing of the Wyndham Land Acts, which eased land agitation by extending a scheme of tenant purchase, to determine the probability and practicality of an invasion of Ireland by a foreign power, and to comment on whether such an invasion would be aided by insurrection<sup>11</sup>.

Lord Grenfell, Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in Ireland, responded to the Prime Minister's questionnaire the following month. Although a greater cache of sources and insights informed his opinion, Grenfell's views in some ways contradict how many of the local R.I.C. described Ireland during this period. By and large, the majority of constables who left records of their service in Ireland regarded the years prior to the Great War as peaceful, with life in the country as a whole being very pleasant<sup>12</sup>. Their chief duties involved regular police work and the occasional suppression of *poitín* distilling, a local form of illegal alcohol production<sup>13</sup> – quite contrary to the revolutionary period that later followed. Grenfell argued that such tranquillity existed only on the surface. »Ireland appears contented«, he stated, »but there is still strong racial antagonism in the country to the British connection, a feeling that might, under certain conditions, prove a source of weakness to the British Empire<sup>14</sup>.« Grenfell hypothesised that an invading force would receive indirect assistance from the Irish in form of food, shelter and information – all of which were sure to be withheld from the British. It was also to be ex-

7 Royal Irish Constabulary Inspector General's monthly report, Jan. 1900, Sir Andrew Reed to Sir David Harrel (Under-Secretary) (TNA, CO 904/69).

8 Statement of Kevin O'Shiel (Irish Military Archives, Dublin [hereafter MAD], Bureau of Military History [BMH], WS 1770), p. 61–62.

9 See, for instance, statements of Tom Byrne, Seán T. O'Kelly, Joseph Lawless, Seamus Robinson, and Frank Henderson (MAD, BMH, WS 564; 1765; 1043; 156; 249).

10 Memorandum of Major-General J.M. Grierson, 4 Jan. 1906 (TNA, WO 106/44). See also, Grenfell, Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in Ireland, »The Defence of Ireland«, 18 Oct. 1905 (TNA, WO 106/44).

11 Arthur Balfour, Questions addressed to the Chief of the General's Staff by the Prime Minister, Whitehall, Aug. 1905 (TNA, CAB 38/10/74).

12 Statements of Eugene Bratton, Patrick Meehan, and Liam O'Riordan (BMH, WS 467; 478; 888).

13 Statement of Liam O'Riordan (BMH, WS 888).

14 Lord Grenfell, Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in Ireland, Reply to Balfour questionnaire, 2 Sept. 1905 (TNA, CAB 38/10/74).

pected, he stated, that »a certain percentage of malcontent Irishmen« would join the raiders<sup>15</sup>. He also believed that an invasion of Ireland would result in long-term financial and imperial calamity:

»The result of a raid on Ireland would probably not have such a serious effect on the British public as would a similar successful attempt on the south, east, or west coasts of England, but it would doubtless cause a financial panic, depress the funds, and create grave misgivings in the minds of the people. As a result, pressure would be put on the Government to keep strong fleets in Home waters, and to retain large land forces in the United Kingdom. The news of such a landing would tend to lower our prestige abroad in India and in our Colonies, and would generally encourage our enemies and depress our friends. In Ireland it would encourage disloyal elements and add to their numbers, especially if the irreconcilables joined the invader in any numbers<sup>16</sup>.«

Sir Neville Gerald Lyttelton, Chief of the General Staff, and Sir Evan MacGregor, Secretary to the Admiralty, concurred with Grenfell. Each agreed that it mattered little whether the invaders were French or German: »The Irish would be just as likely to join one as the other<sup>17</sup>.«

Much of the language used in the responses to Balfour's questionnaire highlight the suspected »disloyalty« of the Irish. Such disloyalty varied in its intensity and geographic concentration, with Dublin serving as »the head centre of Irish disloyalty« outside the south and west. Prior to the Great War it was well established within circles of government and military authority that Ireland was to be treated with suspicion.

Who were these »disaffected« Irishmen? In what ways did they pose a threat to Britain's security? Numerous reports prior to 1914 identify various sections of Irish society as subversive. Some of the more obvious, like the Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.), represented physical force separatism. Though for the most part dormant prior to 1913, the I.R.B.'s »achievement« during the decade before the Great War has been identified as the retention and promotion of separatist ideals and in keeping alive a plot of insurrection until England was distracted by a major war<sup>18</sup>. Its members were active in attending commemorations and funerals of prominent republicans and nationalists, recruiting, and seeking sources of funding and arms. Bulmer Hobson, I.R.B. member and organiser prior to 1916, estimated that the entire membership of the I.R.B. in 1911 totalled around 1000 – the majority of which were in Dublin<sup>19</sup>. The I.R.B. also stood firmly against Irishmen enlisting in the British Army. A dossier of political pamphlets collected by the Colonial Office during the pre-war period illustrates some of the language associated with I.R.B. propaganda. A pamphlet from 1906 read: »Enlisting in the English Army is Treason to Ireland«; and another from 1909 stated: »Join the Army. Sell your soul, your country, and your God for the Saxon shilling, Join England's hireling murderers<sup>20</sup>.«

Several less radical organisations also fell under surveillance, as they contributed to resurgence in Irish cultural nationalism during the period of the Gaelic Revival. The Gaelic Athletic

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Sir N.G. Lyttelton to Secretary, Committee of Imperial Defence, 11 Sept. 1905; Evan MacGregor to Secretary, Committee of Imperial Defence, 16 Oct. 1905 (TNA, CAB 38/10/74).

18 Leon Ó BROIN, *The Story of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood 1858–1924*, Dublin 1976, p. 141.

19 Statement of Bulmer Hobson (MAD, BMH, WS 30). Leon O'Broin reports higher figures for the same period: 1660 members in Ireland and 367 in Britain in 1912. O'BROIN, *Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood* (as in n. 18), p. 140.

20 List of seditious pamphlets, leaflets, and notices, circulated in Ireland from 1905 to the present time (TNA, CO 906/161).

Association (G.A.A.), an organisation formed in 1884 to promote Irish games, was suspected as providing a front for advanced nationalists. Police reports from 1900 reveal that the G.A.A. was more active than it had been for years. Described by the R.I.C. as »the nursery of the physical force party of the future«<sup>21</sup>, the G.A.A. and its sportsmen were said to have been »encouraged by Secret Society agents to meet together at football and hurling matches, where the chances of armed resistance to England are discussed, and the prospects of a revolutionary organisation advanced«<sup>22</sup>. Such reports were passed to the Under Secretary at Dublin Castle, strengthening suspicion of the resurgence of Gaelic culture. Elements of Irish literary culture and nationalist politics certainly coincided. For instance, Patrick Harris, who was a member of the Cork Celtic Society from 1902–1908, identified the association as a forerunner of Sinn Féin<sup>23</sup>. In Castlebar, County Mayo, meetings and membership of the Celtic Literary Society and Sinn Féin often overlapped<sup>24</sup>.

Nationalist politics also led some to question Irish loyalty. The Irish Parliamentary Party (I.P.P. or Irish Party) was reunited under the leadership of John Redmond in February 1900. The Irish Party was highly nationalist, and championed Irish, Catholic causes in Ireland and abroad. For instance, it was boisterous in its condemnation of the 1905 French Law of Separation, which separated Church and State – particularly the ways in which the law would impact upon the Irish College in Paris<sup>25</sup>. Though inconsistent in the four general elections prior to the Great War, it eventually returned enough members to break parliamentary deadlock in the House of Commons in favour of the Liberal Party. The table below illustrates the political fortunes of the Irish Party prior to the Great War.

General Election	Standing Seats	Elected	Gained	Unseated	Net
1900	82	77	2	7	-5
1906	77	82	6	1	+5
1910 (Jan.)	82	71	0	11	-11
1910 (Dec.)	71	74	5	2	+3

Performance of Irish Parliamentary Party in four general elections

The Irish Party was bolstered by the United Irish League (U.I.L.). A grassroots organization formed in 1898, the U.I.L. was ostensibly concerned with land reform, and came to be identified by the main police force in Ireland, the Royal Irish Constabulary (R.I.C.) as an »electioneering agency« for the Irish Party<sup>26</sup>. Its growth and influence alarmed Dublin Castle. Heavily concentrated in the agricultural counties of Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, Cavan, and Cork, its membership only twice fell beneath 120 000 between 1900 and 1914<sup>27</sup>. The fundraising ability

21 Inspector General's monthly report, Mar. 1900 (TNA, CO 904/70).

22 Ibid., Jan. 1900 (TNA, CO 904/69).

23 Statement of Patrick Harris (MAD, BMH, WS 80), p. 1.

24 Statement of Michael McHugh (MAD, BMH, WS 1632), p. 2.

25 Patrick Boyle to John Redmond, 20 Aug. 1907 (National Library of Ireland [NLI], Redmond papers, MS 15,247/7).

26 Inspector General's monthly report, Oct. 1900, Sir Neville Chamberlain to Sir David Harrel (TNA, CO 904/71).

27 Royal Irish Constabulary Office, Dublin Castle, Crime Department – Special Branch, United Irish League, 29 Apr. 1902, 24 Jan. 1908, 17 Jan. 1912, 29 Jan. 1915 (TNA, CO 904/20).

of the U.I.L. was impressive and, in some government circles, alarming. Its »Home Rule« and »Parliamentary« fund campaigns collected thousands of pounds annually, which helped to support the Irish Party machine during the crucial 1910 election, and Home Rule campaign of 1912<sup>28</sup>.

In addition to being involved in fundraising and political canvassing, U.I.L. members also boycotted individuals and families, and intimidated landlords connected with agrarian disputes. Like many Irish cultural and political institutions, the U.I.L. extended beyond Ireland. An undated leaflet from the United Irish League of Great Britain outlined what it believe to be the nature and origin of Irish disloyalty:

»And we hear English statesmen asking us why Ireland is not loyal. [...] Loyal – loyal to what? [...] Why do not these English statesmen give us something to be loyal to? What claim has such a system as that to loyalty? [...] The most trusted and honoured men throughout the length and breadth of Ireland are being sent as common criminals to English jails on vague charges of conspiracy, sent there by degraded tribunals consisting of paid and removable servants of the man who brings the accusation. In Ireland there is neither liberty, prosperity nor loyalty. [...] You cannot disguise from the world that one portion of that Empire – and a portion which, all things considered, had probably as great a part in building that Empire as England itself – a portion which was the home of a brave and noble race which has spread throughout the world the fame of their talents, their virtues, and their valour – here lies at your very heart oppressed, impoverished, manacled, and disloyal, a reproach to your civilization, and a disgrace to your name<sup>29</sup>.«

Although Sinn Féin is most commonly associated with Irish republican separatism, its ideology was underdeveloped prior to the Great War, and its influence limited. Nevertheless, infiltration of Sinn Féin by the I.R.B. did not escape the Special Branch of the Royal Irish Constabulary, which reported their movements to Dublin Castle. Between 1906 and 1913 Sinn Féin's moderate policy, that of dual-monarchy between Ireland and Britain based upon the Austro-Hungarian model, matured toward a model based upon Home Rule within the Empire, as exercised by Canada. In time it would advocate complete independence<sup>30</sup>. Overall, Irish social and political disaffection, as identified by British officials at various levels, certainly had its advocates and apologists in and out of Irish government.

### Evaluating Ireland's defence

Growing Irish political influence, resurgent cultural nationalism and agitation toward political devolution prompted further evaluations of Irish defence strategy prior to the Great War. However, despite its view that war might erupt with a variety of belligerents, the 1909 »Land Defence of the United Kingdom« report plainly stated that land defence against an invasion of mainland Britain – that is, England, Scotland and Wales – formed no part of the policy of Imperial defence, and that this would remain the case so long as the Fleet remained intact<sup>31</sup>. A separate policy existed for Ireland, which remained central to the overall defence scheme for the British Isles. The War Office presumed that a raiding force would use Ireland's strategic geographic

28 Ibid., Summary of U.I.L. returns, various dates.

29 Why Ireland is not loyal, resolution by John Redmond regarding attendance at the coronation of King Edward VII, United Irish League of Great Britain Leaflets – No 2, London, s.d., (NLI, IR 94109. p. 6).

30 Sinn Fein and the Irish Volunteers, c. 1922 (TNA, WO 35/182B); Précis of Information – Crime Special Branch, 11 July 1911 (TNA, CO 904/119).

31 The Land Defence of the United Kingdom: Ireland. Part I, 1909 (TNA, WO 33/544).



position, adjacent to open water, to its advantage. The emphasis on Ireland's security, which had grown since the Entente Cordial, coincided with the anticipated Imperial requirements in a potential war. Again, a wider European or trans-Atlantic conflict with a major power would draw on the resources of the British Army stationed in Ireland. It was the absence of a regular force, to defend against invasion, coupled with the opportunity this presented for insurrection, which troubled the War Office prior to 1914<sup>32</sup>.

Where in Ireland was an invading force expected to land? Where were defence forces concentrated, and how were they instructed to repel an invasion, or quell unrest that might result from that invasion? The deep and jagged inlets of Ireland's western and southern coasts were obvious prospective landing points. It was here that, in 1796, a French fleet landed at Bantry Bay. Cork harbour, Haulbowline Island, Kinsale, Youghal, Berehaven and Waterford in the south, and Galway Bay, Tralee Bay, Dingle Bay and the Shannon Estuary in the west, were all identified as security concerns. Though not strategically vital, these areas possessed the highest concentration of »disaffected« individuals. They were areas where an enemy might aid a rebellion or, as the War Office feared, »embarrass the Imperial Government in the more important operations of [a potential] war«<sup>33</sup>.

The north and west were also considered likely invasion points; a French contingent had again exploited the Irish coast in 1798, this time landing in Mayo. It was believed that a German expedition might also do so by sailing around the Orkney Islands from the North Sea<sup>34</sup>. The large water inlets of Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle, as well as the commercial centre of Belfast, made the north of Ireland vulnerable. The east coast was not a great concern. Dundalk, Drogheda and Wexford were considered unimportant targets. Dublin, though the centre of Irish government and a hotbed of nationalist agitation, was not exclusively identified as a defence priority. The naval bases at Milford Haven and Cork, and the confines of the Irish Sea, deterred an enemy raid on the Irish capital<sup>35</sup>. It was nevertheless anticipated that »any conspiracy against British Rule in Ireland would have its Head Quarters and find most of its active agents in the Capital«<sup>36</sup>.

Overall, it appears that in identifying defence priorities for Ireland, military vulnerability and geography were weighed against the concentration of nationalist centres, and the perceived willingness of the local population to aid, or at least not obstruct invaders. In this vein, a list was compiled immediately prior to the Great War that highlighted counties in Ireland where »disloyal persons [...] might assist an Invading Army by acting as guides and supplying information«, i.e., obstructing the British Army though not actually opposing them<sup>37</sup>. It was comprehensive and provides evidence of the perceived extent of potential subversion in Ireland in the event of invasion.

32 These fears were long-standing. See Rear-Admiral R.N. Custance, Major-General J.C. Ardagh, Captain Charles J. Briggs, and Colonel Percy Lake, Report of a conference between Admiralty and War Office representatives to consider the strategic conditions governing the coast defence of the United Kingdom in war as affected by naval considerations, Nov. 1903 (TNA, WO 106/44).

33 The Land Defence of the United Kingdom: Ireland. Part I, 1909 (TNA, WO 33/544).

34 Lord Grenfell, Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in Ireland, Reply to Balfour questionnaire, 2 Sept. 1905 (T.N.A., CAB 38/10/74); The Land Defence of the United Kingdom: Ireland. Part I, 1909 (TNA, WO 33/544).

35 The Land Defence of the United Kingdom: Ireland. Part I, 1909 (TNA, WO 33/544).

36 List of counties where opposition might be expected in time of War, c. 1914 (TNA, CO 904/174). Several files also outlined places of amusement which »disloyal« Irishmen were known to frequent. These included, but were not limited to, certain theatres, political clubs and dance halls. Disloyalty in places of amusement (National Archives of Ireland [NAI], Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers, 1916, n. 17375 and 20855).

37 List of counties where opposition might be expected in time of War, c. 1914 (TNA, CO 904/174).



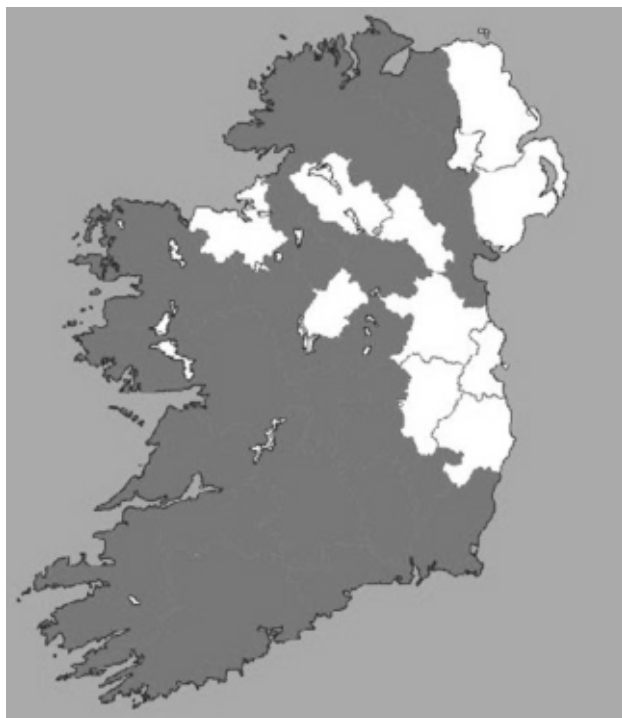


Fig. 1: Irish counties where opposition was expected in time of war, c. 1914 (disaffected counties in black).

Some of the Ireland's perceived weaknesses were addressed between 1909 and 1912. For example, the 3100-mile perimeter of the Irish coast was divided into ten sections, to be reinforced by troops in the event of attack<sup>38</sup>. In addition, standing orders for the Royal Irish Constabulary were re-circulated. These stated that, in an emergency, the R.I.C. would mobilise at strategically selected points for the protection of property, and to calm any local excitement<sup>39</sup>. It was also envisioned that select groups of civilians would aid the police, forming »a nucleus of a loyal and armed body of citizens«<sup>40</sup>. It goes without saying that this citizen militia would be composed of individuals resident in unionist, rather than nationalist areas.

Regardless of these measures, it was acknowledged that a future war would remove a significant portion of the British Army stationed in Ireland to the theatre of combat. This scenario would leave Ireland practically defenceless until the training of a new army commenced, and would saddle the R.I.C. with the dual roles as peacekeepers and national defenders. Questions quickly arose regarding whether it was legal to require civilian policemen to perform military duties.

By 1912 defence schemes involving the R.I.C. were under revision. At this time the force totalled nearly 10 000 men – each professionally drilled by an officer corps and equipped and

38 System of Defence by Field Forces, in: *The Land Defence of the United Kingdom: Ireland*. Part I, 1909 (TNA, WO 33/544).

39 Irish Command Defence Scheme, ch. IV, »Cooperation with civil authorities«, c. 1912 (TNA, CO 904/174).

40 *Ibid.*, 1. Civil police.

trained in the use of firearms. However, the Irish Command Defence Scheme of 1912 explained that, although the R.I.C. was organised along military lines, »its members have only a rudimentary training in the use of firearms, and cannot be regarded as a military force in [...] the event of a hostile landing in Ireland«<sup>41</sup>. Colonel H. Bruce Williams further explained that should Irish constables serve in any defence capacity, they would most certainly be viewed by an invading force as an enemy combatant in accordance with the »Laws and Customs of War on Land«, outlined by the Hague Convention in 1907<sup>42</sup>. Williams concluded: »We can hardly expect a foreign government to differentiate between the Royal Irish Constabulary and any other civilian police force«<sup>43</sup>.« R.I.C. Inspector General, Sir Neville Chamberlain, agreed that although constables had taken an oath of allegiance to the Crown to defend the peace of Ireland, they were not soldiers and could not be called upon, as civil servants, to act in the nation's defence<sup>44</sup>. His views were forwarded to and expressed by the Assistant Under-Secretary, Sir Matthew Nathan, shortly after the First World War's commencement. The Lords Justices presented their judgement several months later: »Military service is quite distinct from Constabulary service. We think that it is quite clear that the Irish Constabulary are not a military force. [...] Suppose they refused to face the German bayonets, could they be liable to the military penalty for cowardice in the face of the enemy? We think they clearly could not«<sup>45</sup>.«

In February 1915, roughly six months into the war, Chamberlain issued a circular that instructed constables not to engage with a foreign invader. The order provided that in the event of a landing by a foreign power, the R.I.C. in the area, to avoid being confused with/mistaken for combatants, »should at once disarm, and render their weapons useless by the removal of the breech blocks«<sup>46</sup>. Major-General L.B. Friend (Commanding Troops in Ireland) illustrated the absurdity of this order to the Under-Secretary:

»A concrete case may be stated at Arklow [County Wicklow], where since the commencement of the war a guard of 50 Royal Irish Constabulary have been protecting the Works of Messrs. Kynoch. [...] Under existing orders if an enemy submarine was to land a party of say 12 armed seamen the guard would disarm, and the enemy's detachment would be free to destroy the works«<sup>47</sup>.«

The issue of Kynoch's had already been raised in a letter to the »Royal Irish Constabulary Gazette« in October 1914. It illustrated both the inadequacy of the guard posted to Kynoch's (which Friend had overestimated) as well as the futility of current government policy:

»There is one man posted on sentry duty on the lonely strand at night, with no one near to call to his assistance if in any trouble, whereas three sentries on short beats on the opposite side of the works, where there are plenty of willing hands to render assistance

41 Ibid.

42 Alexander Pearce HIGGINS, *The Hague Peace Conferences and Other International Conferences Concerning the Laws and Usages of War. Texts of Conventions With Commentaries*, Cambridge 1909.

43 Bruce Williams to Chamberlain, 6 Sept. 1912; Military status of the Royal Irish Constabulary in time of war, 17 Feb. 1915 (TNA, CO 904/174).

44 Chamberlain to Nathan, 20 Aug. 1914 (TNA, CO 904/174); Military status of the Royal Irish Constabulary in time of war, 17 Feb. 1915 (TNA, CO 904/174).

45 Military status of the Royal Irish Constabulary jurisprudence [sic], 1912–1915, 9 Mar. 1915 (TNA, CO 904/174).

46 Friend to Chamberlain, 4 Feb. 1915; E. O'F. to Nathan, 2 Feb. 1915 (TNA, CO 904/223).

47 Friend to Nathan, 2 Feb. 1915 (TNA, CO 904/174).

to a policeman or convey a message to the barrack. The men here are anxious to have the sentry on the strand doubled<sup>48</sup>.«

Though the majority of installations protected by the R.I.C. were inland, the Irish Government conceded that the current policy was senseless<sup>49</sup>. Regular troops were immediately sent to supplement the R.I.C. at Arklow<sup>50</sup>, and Chamberlain quickly amended his circular to county inspectors:

»It is the duty of the Royal Irish Constabulary to protect, by force of arms, if necessary, life and property whenever assailed, and in this capacity they form part of the Armed Forces of the Crown. They should render all possible assistance to the Military forces in Ireland, in case of emergency arising, by offering resistance to the landing of hostile raiding parties, and by protecting to the utmost extent in their power any vulnerable points over which they are or may be placed as guards<sup>51</sup>.«

Ireland was not alone in debating how to employ its police. England and Scotland faced similar practical and legal difficulties. The decision to place weapons in the hands of traditionally unarmed constables proved controversial, but was ultimately deemed necessary. In an effort to protect the civilian status of the English police, several chief constables stationed along the east coast of England suggested that weapons distributed to police should be withdrawn from areas threatened by invasion<sup>52</sup>. Anxiety superseded precaution, however, and numerous constables remained armed and ready to defend vital public works in England throughout the Great War.

### Assessing Britain's suspicion

Was British suspicion of the growth of Irish cultural and political nationalism justified during the pre-war period? Religious and political strife clearly did re-surface in Ireland prior to the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, prompted by the re-introduction of the Home Rule bill to the Commons in 1912. Two political armies, the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish National Volunteers, grew from this dissent. By August 1914, Ireland seemed on the verge of civil war, having endured its own July Crisis in the form of the Bachelor's Walk murders, when British troops fired on a civilian crowd in Dublin following the landing of arms for the nationalist Irish Volunteers, and the failure of the Buckingham Palace Conference to settle border disputes connected to the proposed Home Rule settlement. Indeed, Britain's declaration of war against Germany crucially redirected social tension and political stalemate in Ireland. In this regard, and as David Fitzpatrick has noted, Irish participation must not be interpreted as a simple expression of loyalty to king and country<sup>53</sup>. Rather, Irish enlistment, nationalist as well as Unionist, often resulted from immediate loyalty to both friends and family. For members of

48 Sentry Duty at Kynoch's. NUMNA to Editor, Royal Irish Constabulary Gazette (17 Oct. 1914).

49 Memorandum of interview with Colonel James and Nathan, 4 Feb. 1915 (TNA, CO 904/174).

50 E. O'F. to Nathan, c. Feb. 1915 (TNA, CO 904/223).

51 Chamberlain to County Inspectors, 5 Feb. 1915 (TNA, CO 094/174); Unknown to Chamberlain, 4 Feb. 1915 (Ibid.).

52 Status of police in event of a hostile landing, memorandum of Captain Mayne, Major Bower, and Captain James, 29 Aug., 4 Sept. 1914 (TNA, HO 45/10940/227740; WO 32/9098). Debate regarding the removal of rifles and police from areas in danger of occupation continued until early 1918. See G.H.Q. Home Forces emergency measures, 1 Jan. 1918, and Duties of police in case of invasion, 25 Feb. 1918 (TNA, HO 45/10940/227740).

53 David FITZPATRICK, *Home Front and Everyday Life*, in: John HORNE, (ed.), *Our War*, Dublin 2008, p. 134.

the Ulster and Irish Volunteers, enlistment presented an opportunity for military training, as well as a chance to tip the balance of political capital toward their respective positions on Home Rule.

Paramilitary Volunteers who did not enlist also served a purpose. Irish Party leader John Redmond declared in the House of Commons on 4 August 1914 that the government could withdraw its troop reserves from Ireland, and allow her shores to be jointly defended from invasion by »her armed sons«. »[F]or this purpose«, he announced, »armed Nationalist Catholics in the South will be only too glad to join arms with the armed Protestant Ulstermen in the North<sup>54</sup>.« Following this, each faction observed a political truce, and shifted its efforts toward the European war. Redmond's proposal of guard duty by the Irish National Volunteers for home defence was ultimately not permitted apart from an isolated episode in Cork in January 1915<sup>55</sup>. The government's fear of armed Catholic nationalists outweighed its anxiety over an ill-defended island.

In addition to redirecting elements of Irish society, the war also provided the international distraction hoped for by physical force Irish separatists, and feared by British defence planners. While the Defence of the Realm Act, a series of regulations that aimed to suppress sedition and maintain domestic order during the war, provided greater authority to deter political crime domestically, the threat of invasion persisted. It became particularly serious in late 1914 when the War Office became aware that Roger Casement, an Irish nationalist and former British Imperial Consul, had secured a treaty and formal agreement between Germany and himself as representative of an as yet non-existent Irish Republic. Casement's mission was to form a brigade out of Irish prisoners of war in the British Army. The sixth article of Casement's treaty with Germany outlined how, in the event of a significant naval victory, Germany pledged to send the Irish Brigade, accompanied with efficient military support, arms and ammunition, to Ireland » to aid the cause of Irish independence by force of arms, and above all, to aid Irishmen to themselves fight for their own freedom«<sup>56</sup>. Although Casement failed to recruit more than sixty men, gathering intelligence about his attempt nevertheless occupied War Office and Colonial Office resources for nearly eighteen months, and showed that Ireland could indeed be breached<sup>57</sup>.

An Irish brigade and war materials did not accompany Casement when he arrived in Ireland via a German submarine on Good Friday 1916. He washed ashore in a collapsible boat at Banna Strand in Tralee Bay, County Kerry, was arrested, sent to the Tower of London and hung as a traitor the following August. In April 1918, a German submarine was also able to deliver one of Casement's disciples, Joseph Dowling to Ireland. He was found by a fisherman, on a small island off the Irish coast. His arrest helped to sustain fears of invasion, and strengthened suspi-

54 The parliamentary debates, fifth series, House of Commons, LXV (20<sup>th</sup> July–10<sup>th</sup> August 1914), p. 9. See also »Athlone Weekly«, n.d. (NLI, Redmond papers, MS 15,215/2/A).

55 Justin Dolan STOVER, *Conditional loyalty: the Irish National Volunteers: II. Cork Guard Duty*, in: ID., *A revolution within: loyalty, treason and the Irish Revolution, 1921*, PhD thesis submitted to the Department of History, Trinity College Dublin, 2011, p. 73; Gerry WHITE, Brendan O'SHEA, »Baptised in Blood«. *The Formation of the Cork Brigade of Irish Volunteers, 1913–1916*, Cork 2005; *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Jan. 1915; *Irish Times*, 11 Jan. 1915.

56 *Objects of an Irish Brigade in the present war. Roger Casement to B Company of the Irish soldiers at Limburg*, 15 May 1915 (NLI, Roger Casement papers, MS 13085/9/iv).

57 Casement's movements and activities, 1911–1916 (TNA, PRO 95/776); B. L. REID, *Lives of Casement*, London 1976, p. 234–235. The Germans preferred a delay in publication of the treaty until 200 Irishmen were enlisted in the Irish Brigade. German–Irish treaty, 23–28 Dec. 1914 (University College Dublin Archives [UCDA], Boehm/Casement papers, P127/2); Reinhard DOERRIES, *Prelude to the Easter Rising: Sir Roger Casement in Imperial Germany*, London 2000, p. 71–74; John DEVOY, *Recollections of an Irish Rebel*, New York 1929, p. 433–435.

cion of Irish nationalism, which had grown exponentially since the Easter Rising of 1916. Dowling's landing was used to justify the arrest of Sinn Féin leaders under the guise of a »German plot«<sup>58</sup>.

## Conclusion

The case of Ireland contributes much to our understanding of the pre-war period in both military and cultural contexts. It illustrates that, in entertaining theories of imagined or future wars, an Irish fifth column was granted great consideration by Britain's defence planners. Geography also plays an obvious role when examining the evolution of military strategy, and complicates the reading of Ireland in a simple colonial context. Numerous declarations of professed loyalty reached the Colonial and Foreign offices from throughout the empire during the war<sup>59</sup>. However it was the fidelity of Ireland, on Britain's doorstep, which remained suspect. Suspicion persisted despite a considerable population of loyal, or indifferent, subjects, and the apparent pacification of the Irish population since the turn of the twentieth century.

These factors also challenge the relevance of the term »periphery« to describe Ireland's strategic, as well as social and political position. Though not designated as a theatre of war, maintaining order in Ireland essentially presented Britain with a second front between 1916 and 1918. This continued to be the case following the Armistice, and throughout the Anglo-Irish War (1919–1921), a time when Britain was also involved in conflicts in Russia and throughout the Empire. All considered, strategic planning during the period prior to the Great War illustrates that while Ireland may have been on the periphery of a potential world war, it nevertheless constituted Britain's first line of defence.

58 Case of Dowling (prisoner) July 1918, notes from court martial, (MAD, George Gavan Duffy collection, CD 45/15/2. For extensive material on the »German plot«, see Imperial War Museum, London, John French papers, JDPF 8/1d series.

59 See, for instance, *Loyalty of India and other British Overseas Dominions*, 18 Sept. 1914 (TNA, CO 323/646); *The Sudan Book of Loyalty*. A collection of the general declarations made by the religious and tribal chiefs of the Sudan to H.E. the Governor General expressing their loyalty to the Sudan government and to Great Britain, 4 Aug. 1915 (TNA, FO 633/110).