

## Collusion Hypothesis

This is a story which is recorded in two parts. The encounter upon which these are based occurred in early September 2006 and shortly afterwards when I was already in Shanghai a news disclosure prompted me to make a record of the first part of this story which I will refer to as a collusion hypothesis.

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The recent (mid 2006) publicity about collusion between the armed forces and loyalists in Northern Ireland should really not have come as a surprise to anyone who tried to analyse events beyond the immediate. I would like to add some information about a meeting that I had that, at least for me, seemed to cast so much light on so much of the happenings in NI since 1968. People seem to have forgotten that British troops were sent there to protect the minority in the unpleasant aftermath of the civil rights marches. People have long forgotten that James Callaghan was feted as a hero in the Bogside. Slowly and inexorably the emphasis changed. The protected became the villains. This process was accelerated when the Wilson government was replaced by the Heath administration. Internment and Bloody Sunday followed and these were points of no return. So, how/why did this come about? I think that I might now have some pointers and would like to draw a hypothesis which was given strength by an amazing conversation that I had in early September 2006 when I met a man who had been a senior officer in Northern Ireland, someone who was able to boast that during his period of command he had not lost a single man. Whereas presence in conflict zones damages many people, it had not done this for him. If anything the experience had enhanced him. He relished the challenge and was fascinated by the paradoxes that he encountered. He liked a bit of stone-throwing when they were on patrol "You knew that everything was okay. If there was no jeering/stone throwing then you knew that something was up and you called for back-up". "Over my time there I gained the begrudging respect of the catholic population, which was all that I wanted. It was July, the 'Marching Season' that was just so crazy, so screwy. Here you were, having had the Catholics throw stones at you all year, standing between them and the loyalists. The Catholics were handing you cups of tea, while the loyalists were lobbing bricks at you. One time I was in an armoured car at the front-line, writing a report when a brick somehow got through the window and hit my wrist - it didn't half hurt. I was out of there like a shot and ordered the snatch squad out to get the little bastard that had hit me. What they dragged over was such a wimpish little specimen and when I asked him why he had done that I got a tirade of abuse about denying them their right to march. I had him banged up for six months".

Finding a person who was quite clearly of an open mind I posed him the question that had worried me for such a long time. Why was it that a force that had been sent to protect the Catholics had been so transformed in purpose? He agreed with every point raised. He said that it was entirely brain-washing that all had undergone during the pretour- of-duty training. They had been prepared to deal with a belligerent population that was hell-bent on their destruction. What he and fellow officers encountered was completely at variance to their expectations. He and they found that they had to go against their training and adjust their strategy on-the-fly as circumstances on the ground permitted. "I did it by adopting a system of frequent, in-depth patrols". I made it clear that if the population did not cause me any problems, then I would reciprocate, and it worked".

He said that he found my questions raised questions that had been in his own mind. I put to him the hypothesis that there were forces (individual and/or groups) within the UK military that had agendas that were not necessarily in harmony with official Government policy. I believed that these parties were unhappy with the alteration of the status-quo that followed the events in Northern Ireland from October 1968 onwards. Although the army had been sent to protect the nationalist population, it was possible to influence the mindset of individual servicemen through a very effective propaganda apparatus. I had seen the husband of a friend of a friend who had been posted to NI in 1969 was in a very short time intensely antagonistic to the catholic minority. Later, when I was Deputy Warden in Rutland Hall, in Nottingham I found that one of my resident tutors was very biased in his attitudes to the Irish problem. His father was in the army and was then based in NI.

So, who are these forces? How did they acquire their power and do they still wield this power

?Some sort of answer seems to have come from a programme on BBC TV called "The Plot Against Harold Wilson". It was clear in the programme that there were forces in the military who disagreed with much of the Wilson policies. I certainly remember an exercise where there was a sudden strong military presence at Heathrow Airport. What I had not realised was that it was undertaken without the knowledge of the Government. It was believed to have been intended as a warning to the Government that the army could mount a coup d'etat, if it found it necessary to do. But, why would any army, the servants and defenders of the State want to do that? The programme pointed the finger of blame at Earl Mountbatten and his supporters and there has not been much to refute that. Now, if an army can collude against its own government, then should we be surprised that it colluded with loyalists in order to preserve what it wished to be the status-quo in Northern Ireland? The question should not be whether this happened or not, but whether it happened with the knowledge and approval of the Government? Depending on the response to that question, there should be another question, namely, what steps are HM Government taking to limit any ex-jure activities of its military forces

?There is another question that does not appear to have been asked and that is the extent of contact and possible collusion between some within the army in Northern Ireland and Republican sympathisers? This was perhaps less unusual than one might think. My informant had reason to visit certain Ulster prisons and developed a profound respect for republican prisoners, for their discipline and for their use of time in prison to pursue personal study. On the other hand, he found Loyalist cells full of hate messages, bodybuilding kit and heavily tattooed occupants. So, if this individual view was shared by others who might be less scrupulous, then one could conceive that the boundaries between respect and collusion could in places be blurred. I therefore ask again if there was substantial army/republican fraternisation, sanctioned or otherwise

I have an as-yet unsubstantiated hypothesis that the eventual assassination of Earl Mountbatten could have been the result of collusion between certain republicans and members of UK security forces. For many years Mountbatten and his family had been holidaying in the same place in the Irish Republic and, although there could have been many opportunities to kill him, these had not been taken. So, why then? From his side, his disdain of the dangers to personal security might be viewed as a form of arrogance as he would never have accepted that a part of Ireland had seceded from the Empire. However, many years ago someone told me that he had a particular liking for activities not dissimilar to those attributed to Genl. Sir Maxwell Knight in "One Girls War". Although it was well known in certain

circles, it was never discussed (just as John Major's affair was known but not discussed). Nevertheless, there was an indication that in 1979 it was threatening to become a major source of embarrassment to the Royal family. If any of this is true then how convenient it would be if the man who appears to have been the architect of UK military policy re-alignment in Northern Ireland should perish a hero.

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The second story relates to the same informant and committing this to record at this point was occasioned by the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. He was in Berlin in November 1989 and relates how strange it was that at a critical time, when events were unfolding so quickly in Eastern Europe all senior commanders of the Four Powers were in conclave somewhere in Bavaria and thereby incommunicado when things started to happen in Berlin.

People in West Berlin had only an inkling of what was happening and his report of how the lower echelons of command of the Western Powers reacted is particularly illuminating. The French pointed out that whatever was happening on the other side of the Wall, it was not in their Sector and therefore not their problem. The Americans were convinced that an attack was imminent and brought out every tank onto the streets facing the Wall in their Sector. The British, meanwhile, loaded up their trucks and drove up to the Wall, left their armaments in the trucks and set up trestle tables against the Wall. As holes started to appear, they passed through cups of tea.

He then went on to relate how, with the collapse of the Soviet Union their lines of supply disappeared. There was a Soviet barracks in Potsdam where the troops only survived as a result of food supplied by the British. In return for this kindness their benefactors were allowed access to (allowed to play with) the tanks and other equipment which until a short time before had been threatening them - it was great fun.