

= Real Irish Republican Army =

The Real Irish Republican Army or Real IRA , also referred to as the New IRA (since the 2012 merger) , is an Irish republican paramilitary organisation which aims to bring about a united Ireland . It formed in 1997 following a split in the Provisional IRA by dissident members , who rejected the Provisionals ' ceasefire that year . Like the Provisional IRA before it , the RIRA sees itself as the only rightful successor to the original Irish Republican Army and styles itself as " the Irish Republican Army " in English or Óglaigh na hÉireann in Irish . It is an illegal organisation in the Republic of Ireland and designated as a terrorist organisation in the United Kingdom and the United States .

Since its formation , RIRA has waged a campaign in Northern Ireland against the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) ? formerly the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) ? and the British Army . The RIRA is the largest and most active of the " dissident republican " paramilitary groups operating against the British security forces . It has targeted security forces in gun attacks and bombings , and with grenades , mortars and rockets . The organisation has also been responsible for a number of bombings in Northern Ireland and England with the goal of causing economic harm and / or disruption . The most notable of these was the 15 August 1998 Omagh bombing , which killed 29 people . After that bombing the RIRA went on ceasefire , but began operations again in 2000 . In March 2009 it claimed responsibility for an attack on Massereene Barracks that killed two British soldiers , the first to be killed in Northern Ireland since 1997 .

The Real IRA has also been involved in vigilantism , mainly against alleged drug dealers and organized crime gangs . In Dublin in particular it has been accused of extortion and engaging in feuds with these gangs . In July 2012 it was reported that Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD) and other small republican militant groups were merging with the Real IRA . As before , the group continues to refer to itself as " the Irish Republican Army " , but the new group has been referred as the " New IRA " in the press .

= = Origins = =

In July 1997 the Provisional IRA called a ceasefire . On 10 October 1997 a Provisional IRA General Army Convention was held in Falcarragh , County Donegal . At the convention , Provisional IRA Quartermaster General Michael McKevitt ? also a member of the 12 @-@ person Provisional IRA Executive ? denounced the leadership and called for an end to the group 's ceasefire and to its participation in the Northern Ireland peace process . He was backed by his partner and fellow Executive member Bernadette Sands McKevitt . The two dissidents were outmanoeuvred by the leadership and were left isolated . The convention backed the pro @-@ ceasefire line , and on 26 October McKevitt and Sands McKevitt resigned from the Executive along with other members .

In November 1997 McKevitt and other dissidents held a meeting in a farmhouse in Oldcastle , County Meath , and a new organisation , styling itself Óglaigh na hÉireann , was formed . The organisation attracted disaffected Provisional IRA members from Derry and the republican stronghold of South Armagh , and from other areas including Dublin and Belfast cities and Counties Limerick , Tipperary , Louth , Tyrone , Monaghan and Kerry .

The name " Real IRA " entered common usage when members set up a roadblock in Jonesborough , County Armagh and told motorists " We 're from the IRA . The real IRA " .

= = Objectives = =

The RIRA 's objective is a united Ireland by forcing the end of British sovereignty over Northern Ireland through the use of physical force . The organisation rejects the Mitchell Principles and the Good Friday Agreement , comparing the latter to the 1921 Anglo @-@ Irish Treaty which resulted in the partition of Ireland . The organisation aims to uphold an uncompromising form of Irish republicanism and opposes any political settlement that falls short of Irish unity and independence .

Bernadette Sands McKevitt , sister of hunger striker Bobby Sands and a founder of the RIRA 's

political wing , the 32 County Sovereignty Movement , said in an interview that her brother " did not die for cross @-@ border bodies with executive powers . He did not die for nationalists to be equal British citizens within the Northern Ireland state " . The RIRA adopted a tactic of bombing town centres to damage the economic infrastructure of Northern Ireland . The organisation also attacks members of the security forces using land mines , home @-@ made mortars and car bombs , and has also targeted England using incendiary devices and car bombs to " spread terror and disruption " .

= = Campaign = =

= = = Early campaign = = =

The organisation 's first action was an attempted bombing in Banbridge , County Down on 7 January 1998 . The intention was to explode a 300 lb (140 kg) car bomb , but this was thwarted when the bomb was defused by security forces . The RIRA continued its campaign in late February with bombings in Moira , County Down and Portadown , County Armagh . On 9 May the organisation announced its existence , in a coded telephone call to Belfast media claiming responsibility for a mortar attack on a police station in Belleek , County Fermanagh .

The RIRA also carried out attacks in Newtownhamilton and Newry , and a second attack in Banbridge on 1 August injured 35 people and caused £ 3 @. @ 5 million of damage when a 500 lb (230 kg) car bomb exploded . Despite these attacks the organisation lacked a significant base and was heavily infiltrated by informers . This led to a series of high @-@ profile arrests and seizures by the Garda Síochána in the first half of 1998 ; these involved the death of RIRA member Rónán Mac Lochlainn who was shot dead trying to escape from police , following an attempted robbery of a security van in County Wicklow .

= = = Omagh bombing = = =

On 15 August 1998 the RIRA left a car containing 500 lb of home @-@ made explosives in the centre of Omagh , County Tyrone . The bombers could not find a parking space near the intended target of the courthouse , and the car was left 400 metres away . As a result , three inaccurate telephone warnings were issued , and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) believed the bomb was actually located outside the courthouse . They attempted to establish a security cordon to keep civilians clear of the area , which inadvertently pushed people closer to the actual location of the bomb . Shortly after , the bomb exploded killing 29 people and injuring 220 others , in what became the single deadliest strike of the Troubles .

The bombing caused a major outcry throughout the world , and the Irish and British governments introduced new legislation in an attempt to destroy the organisation . The RIRA also came under pressure from the Provisional IRA , when Provisional IRA members visited the homes of 60 people connected with the RIRA and ordered them to disband and stop interfering with Provisional IRA arms dumps . With the organisation under intense pressure , which included McKevitt and Sands @-@ McKevitt being forced from their home after the media named McKevitt in connection with the bombing , the RIRA called a ceasefire on 8 September .

= = = Ceasefire = = =

Following the declaration of the ceasefire the RIRA began to regroup , and by the end of October had elected a new leadership and were planning their future direction . In late December Irish government representative Martin Mansergh held a meeting with McKevitt in Dundalk , in an attempt to convince McKevitt to disband the RIRA . McKevitt refused , stating that members would be left defenceless to attacks by the Provisional IRA . In 1999 the RIRA began preparations for a renewed campaign , and in May three members travelled to Split in Croatia to purchase arms , which were

smuggled back to Ireland . On 20 October , ten people were arrested when Gardaí raided a RIRA training camp near Stamullen , County Meath .

Officers found a firing range inside a disused wine cellar being used as an underground bunker , and seized weapons including an assault rifle , a submachine gun , a semi @-@ automatic pistol and an RPG @-@ 18 rocket launcher . An earlier version of the rocket launcher , the RPG @-@ 7 , had been in the possession of the Provisional IRA from as early as 1972 , but this was the first time the RPG @-@ 18 had been found in the possession of a paramilitary organisation in Ireland . Among those convicted were Alan Ryan , who was on bail for possession of a loaded revolver at his home in Dublin .

= = = Return to activity = = =

On 20 January 2000 the RIRA issued a call @-@ to @-@ arms in a statement to the Irish News . The statement condemned the Northern Ireland Executive , and stated : " Once again , Óglaigh na hÉireann declares the right of the Irish people to the ownership of Ireland . We call on all volunteers loyal to the Irish Republic to unite to uphold the Republic and establish a permanent national parliament representative of all the people . " The RIRA launched its new campaign on 25 February with an attempted bombing of Shackleton Army Barracks in Ballykelly . The bombers were disturbed as they were assembling the device , which would have caused mass murder if detonated , according to soldiers .

On 29 February a rocket launcher similar to one seized in the 1999 raid was found near an army base in Dungannon , County Tyrone , and on 15 March three men were arrested following the discovery of 500 lb of home @-@ made explosives when the RUC searched two cars in Hillsborough , County Down . On 6 April a bomb attack took place at Ebrington Barracks in Derry . RIRA members lowered a device consisting of 5 lb of homemade explosives over the perimeter fence using ropes , and the bomb subsequently exploded damaging the fence and an unmanned guardhouse .

= = = = Bombings in England = = = =

After the Omagh bombing , the RIRA leadership were unwilling to launch a full @-@ scale campaign in Northern Ireland due to the possibility of civilians being killed . Instead they decided to launch a series of attacks in England , in particular London , which they hoped would attract disenchanted Provisional IRA members to join the RIRA . On 1 June 2000 a bomb damaged Hammersmith Bridge ; a symbolic target for Irish republican paramilitary groups . The bridge had been targeted by the Irish Republican Army on 29 March 1939 as part of its Sabotage Campaign , and by the Provisional IRA on 24 April 1996 .

On 19 July , security forces carried out a controlled explosion on a bomb left at Ealing Broadway station and public transport was disrupted when the Metropolitan Police closed Victoria and Paddington train stations and halted services on the London Underground . On 21 September a rocket @-@ propelled grenade was fired at the MI6 headquarters using an RPG @-@ 22 rocket launcher , which generated headlines around the world . On 21 February 2001 a bomb disguised as a torch (flashlight) left outside a Territorial Army base in Shepherd 's Bush seriously injured a 14 @-@ year @-@ old cadet , who was blinded and had his hand blown off . A second attack in Shepherd 's Bush , the 4 March BBC bombing , injured a civilian outside the BBC Television Centre . The explosion was captured by a BBC cameraman , and the footage was broadcast on TV stations worldwide , and gained mass publicity for the group . On 14 April a bomb exploded at a postal sorting office in Hendon , causing minor damage but no injuries . Three weeks later on 6 May a second bomb exploded at the same building , causing slight injuries to a passer @-@ by . The 3 August Ealing bombing injured seven people , and on 3 November a car bomb containing 60 lb of home @-@ made explosives was planted in the centre of Birmingham . The bomb did not fully detonate and no one was injured .

== == Renewed campaign in Northern Ireland == ==

The successful attack on Hammersmith Bridge encouraged the RIRA leadership to launch further attacks in Northern Ireland . On 19 June 2000 a bomb was found in the grounds of Hillsborough Castle , home of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Peter Mandelson . On 30 June a bomb exploded on the Dublin @-@ to @-@ Belfast railway line near the village of Meigh in County Armagh . The explosion damaged the tracks , and caused disruption to train services . On 9 July a car bomb damaged buildings in Stewartstown , County Tyrone including an RUC station , and on 10 August an attack in Derry was thwarted by the RUC after a van containing a 500 lb bomb failed to stop at a police checkpoint . Following a car chase the bombers escaped across the Irish border , and the Irish Army carried out a controlled explosion on the bomb after the van was found abandoned in County Donegal . On 13 September two 80 lb bombs were planted at the Magilligan army camp in County Londonderry , one of which was planted in a wooden hut and partially exploded when a soldier opened the door to the hut . The second bomb was found during a follow @-@ up search and made safe by bomb disposal experts . On 11 November the RUC and British Army prevented a mortar attack after stopping a van near Derrylin , County Fermanagh , and the RUC prevented a further attack on 13 January 2001 when an 1100 lb bomb was found in Armagh ? the largest bomb found in several years according to the RUC .

On 23 January the RIRA attacked Ebrington Army Barracks in Derry for a second time , firing a mortar over a perimeter fence . A mortar similar to the one used in the attack was found by Gardaí near Newtowncunningham on 13 February , and British army bomb disposal experts made safe another mortar found between Dungannon and Carrickmore on 12 April . On 1 August a 40 lb bomb was discovered in a car at the long @-@ stay car park of Belfast International Airport following a telephone warning , and was made safe with two controlled explosions by bomb disposal experts . In December a six @-@ day security operation ended when a 70 lb bomb found under railway tracks at Killeen Bridge near Newry was defused . The operation began following a number of telephone warnings , and the road and railway line connecting Newry to Dundalk were closed due to security alerts . A pipe bomb was discovered at a police officer 's home in Annalong , County Down on 3 January 2002 , and two teenage boys were injured in County Armagh on 2 March when a bomb hidden in a traffic cone exploded . On 29 March 2002 the RIRA targeted a former member of the Royal Irish Regiment from Sion Mills , County Tyrone , with a bomb attached to his car that failed to explode . On 1 August 2002 a civilian worker was killed by an explosion at a Territorial Army base in Derry . The man , a 51 @-@ year @-@ old former member of the Ulster Defence Regiment , was the thirtieth person killed by the RIRA .

== == Arrests == ==

Despite the RIRA 's renewed activity , the organisation was weakened by the arrest of key members and continued infiltration by informers . McKevitt was arrested on 29 March 2001 and charged with membership of an illegal organisation and directing terrorism , and remanded into custody . In July 2001 , following the arrests of McKevitt and other RIRA members , British and Irish government sources hinted that the organisation was now in disarray . Other key figures were jailed , including the RIRA 's Director of Operations , Liam Campbell , who was convicted of membership of an illegal organisation , and Colm Murphy who was convicted of conspiring to cause the Omagh bombing , although this conviction was overturned on appeal .

On 10 April 2002 Ruairi Convey , from Donaghmede , Dublin , was jailed for three years for membership of the RIRA . During a search of his home a list of names and home addresses of members of the Gardaí 's Emergency Response Unit was found . Five RIRA members were also convicted in connection with the 2001 bombing campaign in England , and received sentences varying from 16 years to 22 years imprisonment . In October 2002 , McKevitt and other RIRA members imprisoned in Portlaoise Prison issued a statement calling for the organisation to stand down . After a two @-@ month trial , McKevitt was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment in August 2003 after being convicted of directing terrorism .

=== 2002 ? 2007 ===

After McKevitt 's imprisonment , the RIRA regrouped . The RIRA claimed responsibility for a series of firebomb attacks against premises in Belfast in November 2004 , and an attack on a Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) patrol in Ballymena during March 2006 was attributed to the RIRA by the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) . On 9 August 2006 , fire bomb attacks by the RIRA hit businesses in Newry , County Down . Buildings belonging to JJB Sports and Carpetright were destroyed , and ones belonging to MFI and TK Maxx were badly damaged . On 27 October 2006 , a large amount of explosives was found in Kilbranish , Mount Leinster , County Carlow by police , who believe the RIRA were trying to derail the peace process with a bomb attack . The IMC believe the RIRA were also responsible for a failed mortar attack on Craigavon PSNI Station on 4 December 2006 . The IMC 's October 2006 report stated that the RIRA remains " active and dangerous " and that it seeks to " sustain its position as a terrorist organisation " . The RIRA has stated it has no intention of calling a ceasefire unless a declaration of intent to withdraw from Northern Ireland is made by the British Government .

In a lengthy interview with An Phoblacht newspaper in 2003 , the leadership of the Provisional IRA said that the RIRA had " no coherent strategy " .

The Real IRA were suspected of complicity in the murder in December 2006 of drug @-@ dealer Martin ' Marlo ' Hyland . Hyland was shot dead at his Dublin home , along with a plumber , Anthony Campbell , who was carrying out work at the house . The organisation was embroiled in a feud with Hyland 's gang at the time .

=== 2007 ? 2013 ===

On 8 November 2007 two RIRA members shot an off @-@ duty PSNI officer as he sat in his car on Bishop Street in Derry , causing injuries to his face and arm . On 12 November another PSNI member was shot by RIRA members in Dungannon , County Tyrone . On 7 February 2008 , the RIRA stated that , after experiencing a three @-@ year period of reorganisation , it intends to " go back to war " by launching a new offensive against " legitimate targets " . It also , despite having apologised for the Omagh bombing , denied any large scale involvement with the attack and said that their part had only gone as far as their codeword being used . On 12 May 2008 the RIRA seriously injured a member of the PSNI when a booby trap bomb exploded underneath his car near Spamount , County Tyrone . On 25 September 2008 the RIRA shot a man in the neck in St Johnston , near the Derry border . The same man was targeted in a pipe bomb attack on his home on 25 October , the RIRA did not claim responsibility for the attack , but security forces believe they were responsible for it .

On 7 March 2009 the RIRA claimed responsibility for the 2009 Massereene Barracks shooting . This shooting occurred outside the Massereene Barracks as four soldiers were receiving a pizza delivery . Two soldiers were killed , and the other two soldiers and two deliverymen were injured . On 3 April 2009 the RIRA in Derry claimed responsibility for carrying out a punishment shooting of a man who was awaiting sentencing for raping a 15 @-@ year @-@ old girl . The RIRA were also blamed for orchestrating rioting in the Ardoyne area of Belfast on 13 July 2009 as an Apprentice Boys parade was passing . Several PSNI officers were injured in the rioting and at least one shot was fired at police . In early November , the Independent Monitoring Commission released a report stating that the threat from the RIRA and other dissident republicans was at its most serious level since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement .

When drug dealer Sean Winters was shot dead in Portmarnock , north Dublin in September 2010 , the Real IRA " emerged as the chief suspects " . They were also suspected of shooting dead drugs gang leader Michael Kelly in Coolock in September 2011 .

On 5 October 2010 , a car bomb exploded outside a branch of the Ulster Bank on Culmore Road in Derry . Two police officers were slightly injured in the blast , which also damaged a hotel and other businesses . Several telephone warnings were received an hour prior to the blast allowing police to

cordon off the area . The RIRA later claimed responsibility in a telephone call to the Derry Journal .

A large Real IRA explosives dump and arms cache were discovered in Dunleer , County Louth by Gardaí in October 2010 , following a weekend of searches and arrests in the east of the country . In addition , two Real IRA men were charged in Dublin 's non @-@ jury Special Criminal Court of membership of an illegal organisation . The Real IRA claimed responsibility for kidnapping and shooting dead of one of their members , Kieran Doherty , for alleged drug dealing . Further significant seizures of Real IRA arms and explosives were made by the Gardaí during 2012 and 2013 , leading to the arrest of over a dozen persons . In 2011 Michael Campbell , brother of Liam , was found guilty in Vilnius , Lithuania , of trying to purchase arms and explosives and was sentenced to twelve years in jail . In October 2013 Campbell was freed on appeal , only to have the Supreme Court of Lithuania order a retrial in June 2014 . Campbell has maintained his innocence , accusing British intelligence of attempting to frame him . In June 2013 Gardaí arrested eight people after a Real IRA meeting and uncovered a massive haul of the plastic explosive Semtex in two raids in Dublin . In October 2013 the Real IRA claimed responsibility for " executing " an alleged leading cocaine dealer in north Belfast .

= = = 2012 ? present : Since the merger (" New IRA ") = = =

On 26 July 2012 , it was reported that Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD) and other small republican militant groups were merging with the Real IRA . As before , the group would continue to refer to itself as " the Irish Republican Army " . It issued the following statement :

The leadership of the Irish Republican Army remains committed to the full realisation of the ideals and principles enshrined in the Proclamation of 1916 .

In recent years the establishment of a free and independent Ireland has suffered setbacks due to the failure among the leadership of Irish nationalism and fractures within republicanism . The root cause of conflict in our country is the subversion of the nation 's inalienable right to self @-@ determination and this has yet to be addressed . Instead the Irish people have been sold a phoney peace , rubber @-@ stamped by a token legislature in Stormont .

Non @-@ conformist republicans are being subjected to harassment , arrest and violence by the forces of the British crown ; others have been interned on the direction of an English overlord . It is Britain , not the IRA , which has chosen provocation and conflict .

The IRA 's mandate for armed struggle derives from Britain 's denial of the fundamental right of the Irish people to national self @-@ determination and sovereignty -- so long as Britain persists in its denial of national and democratic rights in Ireland the IRA will have to continue to assert those rights .

The necessity of armed struggle in pursuit of Irish freedom can be avoided through the removal of the British military presence in our country , the dismantling of their armed militias and the declaration of an internationally observed timescale that details the dismantling of British political interference in our country .

After the merger , the media began to refer to the group as the " New IRA " . As well as RAAD , the alliance includes an east Tyrone group thought to be responsible for killing PSNI officer Ronan Kerr in 2011 , and a Belfast group who badly wounded PSNI officer Peadar Heffron in 2010 . The Continuity IRA , and the group often referred to as ONH , remain independent . The PSNI reckoned that the new group has a membership of " between 250 and 300 military activists , backed up by associates " . In November 2012 it claimed responsibility for shooting dead a Prison Officer near Lurgan , the first prison officer to be killed since 1993 .

On 3 September 2012 prominent Real IRA member Alan Ryan was shot dead in Dublin . Gardaí believed that he had been involved in a feud with major crime gangs from whom he was trying to extort money . Following Ryan 's death an internal feud developed in the Real IRA . Ryan 's replacement as leader and another associate were shot and wounded in November 2012 , allegedly on the orders of the Northern leadership . In March 2013 , another prominent former Real IRA member , Peter Butterly from Dunleer , was shot dead ; three Dublin men , allegedly from the Alan Ryan faction , were charged with his murder and Real IRA membership .

In February 2014 the group sent seven letter bombs to British Army recruitment offices in south @-@ east England ; the first time republicans had struck in Britain since 2001 . The following month , a PSNI landrover was hit by an explosively formed projectile in Belfast . A civilian car was also hit by debris , but there were no injuries . The Real IRA claimed responsibility . In November 2014 , a PSNI armoured jeep was hit by another ' horizontal mortar ' in Derry , and in Belfast a PSNI landrover was attacked with a homemade rocket @-@ propelled grenade (RPG) launcher .

In April ? May 2015 , there were two Real IRA bomb attacks in Derry . One exploded at the Probation Board offices , and two partially exploded at the perimeter fence of a British Army Reserve base . Later in May , four men , one an alleged associate of Real IRA leader Michael McKevitt , were reportedly arrested during an explosives seizure by police in Northern Ireland . In August , a firebomb exploded in a post van parked inside Palace Barracks , Holywood , a British military base which is home to MI5 in Northern Ireland . The firebomb destroyed the van and set nearby vehicles and garages on fire . On Halloween morning , three men were arrested and charged with IRA membership in addition to firearm offences . In November , a PSNI vehicle in Belfast was riddled with automatic gunfire , fired from an AK @-@ 47 . On Christmas Day in North Belfast , police came under fire again but were not injured . The attacker was charged with attempted murder . Days later , on 27 November 2015 , police in West Belfast came under heavy fire yet again . No officers were wounded because of the armour @-@ plating and bullet @-@ proof glass . The Real IRA or another dissident Republican group was suspected to be behind the attack .

On March 4 , 2016 , a prison officer (Adrian Ismay) had a heart attack and died in a hospital . He had received serious wounds following a booby @-@ trap bomb detonating under his van on Hillsborough Drive , East Belfast 11 days earlier . The wounds he received from the bombing were directly responsible for the heart attack that killed him . The ' New ' IRA claimed responsibility and said it was a response to the alleged mistreatment of republican prisoners at Maghaberry Prison . It added that the officer was targeted because he trained prison officers at Maghaberry .

In April 2016 , Gardaí arrested two significant members of the New IRA and seized ? 10 @,@ 000 . In April , 2016 , explosives linked to the New IRA were found in Dublin and several people were questioned by police . The New IRA declared that all criminals were legitimate targets after Alan Ryan 's brother , Vincent Ryan , was shot dead . In April 2016 , the New IRA were blamed for badly injuring a man in a punishment shooting in Derry , shortly after a man had been killed by a dissident Republican attack in Ardoyne . In May 2016 three men were shot in paramilitary style attacks in republican areas of Belfast during a 24 @-@ hour period , leaving two injured and one dead . On 25 April a New IRA member , Michael Barr was shot dead in west Dublin . Gardaí suspected Barr was shot dead because it was believed by the Kinahan cartel he provided a ? safe house ? to one of the gunmen in the Regency Hotel attack . Fifteen people were arrested in Northern Ireland following a paramilitary funeral for him .

The terrorist threat level in Great Britain was upgraded to " substantial " on 11 May 2016 , with the New IRA 's continuing threats being part of the reason by Home Secretary Theresa May and MI5 .

On 16 May 2016 a ' terrorist hide ' was found by civilians in Capanagh Forest near Larne , Antrim , possibly belonging to the New IRA . It was a very substantial cache .

In June 2016 it was revealed that a five @-@ man New IRA hit team were in Dublin 's north inner city looking to murder two leading gangsters after one of their associates was shot dead in a gangland feud . Sources said the murder squad from the North spent several days and nights looking for their targets in the streets .

= = Structure and status = =

The RIRA has a command structure similar to the Provisional IRA , with a seven @-@ member Army Council consisting of a chief of staff , quartermaster general , director of training , director of operations , director of finance , director of publicity , and adjutant general . The rank @-@ and @-@ file members operate in active service units of covert cells to prevent the organisation from being compromised by informers . As of June 2005 , the organisation is believed to have a maximum of about 150 members , according to a statement by the Irish Minister for Justice ,

Equality and Law Reform , Michael McDowell .

The RIRA also has a political wing , the 32 County Sovereignty Movement (formerly the 32 County Sovereignty Committee) , led by Francis Mackey . The RIRA is distinct from the Continuity IRA , another Provisional IRA splinter group founded in 1986 , although the two groups have been known to co -@-@ operate at a local level . The Provisional IRA has been hostile to the RIRA and issued threats to RIRA members , and in October 2000 was alleged to be responsible for the fatal shooting of Belfast RIRA member Joe O 'Connor according to O 'Connor 's family and 32 County Sovereignty Movement member Marian Price .

Organisations called " Irish Republican Army " are illegal in both UK law and Irish law ; both proscriptions have been held to apply to the RIRA as to other groups of the name . Membership in the organisation is punishable by a sentence of up to ten years imprisonment under UK law . In 2001 the United States government designated the RIRA as a " Foreign Terrorist Organization " (FTO) . This makes it illegal for Americans to provide material support to the RIRA , requires American financial institutions to freeze the group 's assets , and denies suspected RIRA members visas into the United States .

= = Funding = =

In 2014 , Forbes magazine estimated the group 's annual turnover at \$ 50 million . According to the police in Northern Ireland , the main sources of the Real IRA 's funding are illegal fuel operations and various smuggling activities .

= = Weaponry = =

The RIRA initially took small amounts of materiel from Provisional IRA arms dumps under the control of McKevitt and other former Provisional IRA members , including the plastic explosive Semtex , Uzi submachine guns , AK @-@ 47 and AK @-@ 74 assault rifles , handguns , shotguns , detonators , and timing devices . The defection of senior Provisional IRA members also gave the RIRA the ability to manufacture home @-@ made explosives and improvised mortars , including the Mark 15 mortar capable of firing a 200 lb shell .

In 1999 the organisation supplemented its equipment by importing arms from Croatia , including military explosive TM500 , CZ Model 25 submachine guns , modified AK @-@ 47 assault rifles with a folding stock , and RPG @-@ 18 and RPG @-@ 22 rocket launchers . But a July 2000 attempt to smuggle a second consignment of arms was foiled by Croatian police , who seized seven RPG @-@ 18s , AK @-@ 47 assault rifles , detonators , ammunition , and twenty packs of TM500 .

In 2001 RIRA members travelled to Slovakia to procure arms , and were caught in a sting operation by the British security agency MI5 . The men attempted to purchase five tonnes of plastic explosives , 2 @,@ 000 detonators , 500 handguns , 200 rocket @-@ propelled @-@ grenades , and also wire @-@ guided missiles and sniper rifles . Three men from County Louth were arrested and extradited to the UK and subsequently imprisoned for 30 years each after pleading guilty to conspiring to cause explosions and other charges .

In June 2006 , the PSNI made a number of arrests following an MI5 sting operation targeting a dissident republican gun smuggling plot . The RIRA had attempted to procure arms from France including Semtex and C @-@ 4 plastic explosives , SA @-@ 7 surface @-@ to @-@ air missiles , AK @-@ 47s , rocket launchers , heavy machine guns , sniper rifles , pistols with silencers , anti @-@ tank weapons and detonators . On 30 June 2010 , two of those arrested were found guilty following a trial by judge in Belfast . On 1 October 2010 one man was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for attempting to import weapons and explosives , while the other was sentenced to 4 years imprisonment for making a Portuguese property available for the purpose of terrorism .