



David A. Charters. *Whose Mission, Whose Orders?: British Civil-Military Command and Control in Northern Ireland, 1968-1974.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017. xii + 300 pp. Ill. \$36.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7735-4926-5.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

David Charters's *Whose Mission, Whose Orders?* is a study of British civil-military relations (CMR), the command and control relationship between politicians and generals, during the first six years of the conflict in Northern Ireland, commonly known as the "Troubles." Incorporating current CMR theories, Charters challenges many scholars who came before. He argues the "government exercised a great deal of political control over military operations in Northern Ireland in the period under study" (p. 8).

Charters gives a play-by-play of the military and government archival records held at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) and The National Archives (TNA) in Kew, tracking recently released Cabinet Office, Ministry of Defence, Home Office, Prime Minister's Office, and Northern Ireland Office files. He attempts to capture the media's perspective through relevant British newspaper material and personal papers of military leaders held at the Imperial War Museum and the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives. The text does not include any author-conducted oral history, which could have provided a rich, personal touch.

A great benefit of Charters's text lies in its structure, with a lengthy introduction and conclusion. This longer introduction allows for Char-

ters's engagement with CMR theory and his justification of its use in such a study. However, as engaging with theory in conflict historiography is so limited it would have been nice to see how Charters makes this connection explicit in the content chapters of his text. Most specifically, this engagement with theory could have benefited his treatment of the introduction of internment without trial with Operation Demetrius, citing Martin McCleery's *Operation Demetrius and Its Aftermath: A New History of the Use of Internment without Trial in Northern Ireland 1971-75* (2015). A discussion of theory here could have been an opportunity to radically intervene in the historiography.

Three major points emerge from Charters's study of the relationship between the British cabinet, military leadership, and the intelligence community. First, the development of policy was not instantaneous. For example, the introduction of internment without trial or Operation Motorman needed to go up and down the chain of military command and gain cabinet consensus while being overseen by civil servants in several departments. Politicians in Northern Ireland needed to be consulted on these decisions, creating a "glacial pace" of policy and decision-making (p. 37). Although Charters discusses this in his introduction, it would have been helpful to have this point ex-

tended in the content chapters of the book in relation to Operation Motorman, Bloody Sunday, or Operation Demetrius.

The second major point Charters makes acknowledges that the government had much less freedom of action to create defense policies for Northern Ireland before March 1972. The cabinet's power was weak until the introduction of Direct Rule from Westminster. Direct Rule had become a "political football" that both the Labour and Conservative governments attempted to delay catching during their tenures in power. Policy-making, Charters contends, was much more a bottom-up process.

Finally, Charters highlights that defense policy had to be made in secret. Malcolm McIntosh, whose study Charters quotes in this work, addressed this issue, charting that the need to keep these policies secret created a closed loop of "insiders" who would exclude alternative decisions or policies (p. 38). Charters concludes his introduction suggesting that all civil-military command and armed forces control defies rational models or a single theory. Decision-making practices were not linear. They did not descend from the prime minister to the cabinet to the military leaders and further on down the chain of command. Decisions were "interactive and dynamic, involving constant, often prolonged, negotiation, compromise, and consensus building" (p. 38). CRM in Northern Ireland between 1968 and 1974 reveals the nature of British command and control of armed forces. Multiple loci of controls, the prime minister, the defense minister, cabinet committees, the Chiefs of Staff Committee, all impacted on defense policy and decision-making. To say the Westminster government was powerless to intervene removes culpability and shifts blame solely onto to the British military command. This argument has major implications for military action in Northern Ireland. It highlights the importance of individuals, "not just systems and structures" (p. 38). Charters acknowledges "personal-

ties mattered, and some were more influential than others" (p. 39). However once the British Army entered the conflict directly after the "Battle of the Bogside" in August 1969, military command and control issues "entailed complex, protracted infra- and interdepartmental ... negotiations and difficult decisions that would put civil-military relations to the test" (p. 39).

In "Planning for Aid to the Civil Power, 1968-69," Charters outlines Britain's authority over Northern Ireland included the responsibility to supply troops if requested to aid the local civil power. As part of these basic operational principles, troops needed to use the minimum amount of force, refuse to "take sides," and operate as formed units under the command of their officers, with civil authorities having the ultimate authority of deployment and recall (p. 43). Interestingly it is the last two principles that Charters outlines as most important. In the case of Bloody Sunday, for example, when the 1st battalion parachute regiment shot and killed fourteen unarmed civilians at a civil rights march in Derry, it is difficult to claim they were rogue operators. Charters's study tests this idea about how much control or influence civil authorities had over the conduct of operations. Who then, ultimately, should we consider responsible? The commanding military officer decides the "minimum force," not military law or doctrine. Charters notes that this idea places officers in "a difficult moral and legal position, facing probable prosecution if they used either too much or too little force" (p. 44). So in extreme cases, like Bloody Sunday, we see the power of individuals and circumstance.

Charters challenges the previous historiography, championed by Peter Neumann in *Britain's Long War* (2003), which argues that politics and the military were less intertwined. Sir Frank Cooper, a former deputy undersecretary at the MOD and later permanent undersecretary at the NIO, claimed in a 1992 interview Charters cites in this study that "in the early days there wasn't any

political system of control of the military.” Charters uses Cooper’s own words to contradict this viewpoint that “no politician can give the military an order. It can give them a direction” (p. 32). This attention to the nuance of language benefits Charters’s work throughout. Another strength of Charters’s book is how it integrates a significant amount of the current historiography with his studies of newly released British government and military archival material, as there has been a recent trend for scholars to disregard the work of others. Charters regularly refers to scholars of military policy on the conflict, including Thomas Hennessey, Ed Moloney, Niall Ó Dochartaigh, Martin McCleery, and Richard English. Yet there are some important omissions. For example, engaging with Stuart Aveyard’s *No Solution: The Labour Government and the Northern Ireland Conflict 1974-79* (2016) could have influenced Charters’ views on Labour policy toward the conflict in the final year of his study. The failure to mention Shaun McDaid’s *Template for Peace: Northern Ireland, 1972-75* (2013) in his section exploring the Sunningdale Agreement and Ulster Workers’ Council (UWC) strike is particularly unfortunate. Furthermore, the recent work of Huw Bennett, Edward Burke, Tony Craig, and Aaron Edwards on intelligence gathering is also missing although it is difficult to ascertain whether such materials were available to the author at the time of writing.

In conclusion, Charters’s argument muddies the waters by truly asking the question, “Whose mission, whose orders?” The implications of this argument could be extreme, especially proposed cases to prosecute soldiers for Troubles-related events.

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