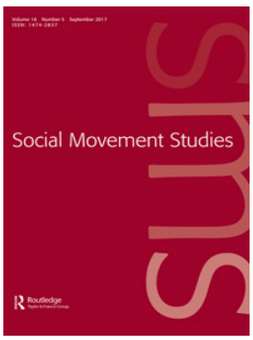

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# From armed group to movement: armed struggle and movement formation in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country

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# From armed group to movement: armed struggle and movement formation in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country

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**ABSTRACT**

In recent decades, social movement scholars have expanded our understanding of 'terrorism' by analyzing a particular trajectory, *movement to armed group*, whereby movement demobilization spurs armed struggle. This article analyzes an alternative trajectory: *armed group to movement*. Once armed struggle's limitations become apparent, armed groups often adopt an attritional military strategy suited to their capacities. To securely wage an attritional campaign, groups *disembed* through the adoption of insular structures, removing them from their milieux and from recruits and resources needed for organizational reproduction. To offset this, armed groups *reembed* through the development of *politico-military movement structures*: forming allied aboveground movement organizations; coordinating armed and unarmed activism; and creating a 'movement' identity. This offsets disembedding in three ways. First, collective action augments armed groups' violence by expanding the struggle into new domains. Second, mobilized support provides armed groups political legitimacy, countering the 'terrorist' label. Third, aboveground movement organizations assist in recruitment, alliance-formation, public communication, and mobilization, facilitating armed groups' organizational reproduction. This paper investigates the strategic decision to adopt movement structures by analyzing documents produced by militants linked to the IRA and to rival ETAs, ETA Politico-Military and ETA Military, allowing for the exploration of different aspects of the decision to adopt movement structures. From Irish republican texts, insights into the basic benefits of movement development are gleaned. Basque separatist documents, on the other hand, provide perspectives on the nature of interorganizational centralization and coordination within politico-military movements.

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In recent decades, social movement scholars have expanded our understanding of 'terrorism' by analyzing the complex relationships between clandestine armed groups and allied nonviolent movements, focused largely on one trajectory, *movement to armed group*, whereby radicals faced with demobilization use violence to rekindle the struggle's flame (Alimi, 2011; Alimi, Bosi, & Demetriou, 2015; Della Porta, 2006; Della Porta & Tarrow, 1987; Zwerman & della Porta, 2000). This article analyzes an alternative trajectory: *armed group to movement*. Once armed struggle's limitations become apparent, armed groups often adopt a long-term attritional model more suited to their capacities. To conduct an attritional campaign in the face of concerted repression, armed groups *disembed* through the adoption of insular organizational structures. These structures, however, remove groups from their milieux

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– and thus from recruits and resources needed for organizational reproduction. To insure long-term reproduction, armed groups partially *reembed* through the development of *politico-military movement structures*: forming allied aboveground movement organizations; coordinating armed and unarmed activism; and creating a 'movement' identity. Such structures provide armed groups with durable means for obtaining recruits and resources, while offsetting the armed group's marginalization as 'terrorists' by representing it as the vanguard of a popular movement. Furthermore, expanding collective action into new domains augments low-level attritional violence in pursuit of political goals.

This article investigates the strategic decision to adopt politico-military movement structures by the Provisional Irish Republican Army and Basque Homeland and Freedom (ETA). Both groups followed a similar trajectory after armed struggle's initiation: organizational *disembedding* alongside partial *reembedding* through movement-development following the adoption of an attritional military strategy. By the mid-seventies, the Provisional IRA's traditional brigade structure – scores of militants organized into geographical military units – proved vulnerable to police penetration, forcing the adoption of a cellular model. This structure, while providing greater security, isolated the IRA from its milieu. Developing republicanism's political wing, particularly Sinn Fein, offset this marginalization while providing the IRA with 'protective support barriers.' In the Basque case, ETA's failure to develop a 'political apparatus' on the eve of Spanish democratization provoked a schism in 1974 and the creation of rival organizations, ETA Politico-Military and ETA Military. Both agreed on the need for the development of an ETA-linked 'political apparatus' to take advantage of democratization. They differed, however, over how to coordinate armed struggle with collective action. ETA Politico-Military argued for centralized control over both violent and nonviolent activism, while ETA Military called for a decentralized structure consisting of loosely coordinated autonomous groups aligned with ETA.

To explore this decision to adopt politico-military movement structures, I examine the writings of militants. Gerry Adams and his allies published numerous treatises in the movement weekly, *Republican News*, calling for republicanism's transformation into a bona fide movement – writings especially significant given the relative scarcity of IRA-produced materials (Whalen, 2006). ETA, in contrast, wrote prodigiously (Zulaika & Douglass, 1996, p. 34). Militants debated at length the advantages and disadvantages of both centralization and decentralization. Of course, these militant-produced documents are *aspirational* in their content, detailing what militants *hoped to achieve, not their actual achievements*. These documents may not provide evidence of the actual organizational structures implemented, but they are critical for investigating the very decision to adopt politico-military movement structures.

The cases are significantly different, as reflected in the texts examined below. Militants debated issues particular to their respective struggles. 'Going political' was controversial among Irish republicans. Gerry Adams and his young allies had to convince veteran militarists that political development would not supplant the IRA's military campaign, but rather bolster it. Republican writings thus detail the benefits of creating movement structures around the IRA, giving key insights into the basic thinking behind adopting the politico-military model. Among Basque separatists, in contrast, the military and political struggles had always been one. How to coordinate the two was the issue. The debate between ETA Politico-Military and ETA Military centered on movement structure, centralized or decentralized. Comparing documents produced by IRA and ETA militants allows for investigating different aspects of the decision to adopt movement structures. From Irish republican texts, insights into the basic benefits of movement-formation are gleaned. Basque separatist documents, on the other hand, provide perspectives on the problems of interorganizational authority and coordination within politico-military movements.

This article is organized into four parts. First, I examine how movement-formation can be a means for organizational reproduction, for bolstering low-level violence, and for offsetting the armed group's political marginalization by addressing the problems of recruitment, alliance-formation, public communication, and mass mobilization. I also consider the benefits and disadvantages of movement centralization and decentralization. Second, I examine the discourse on expanding the republican movement as part of the IRA's 'Long War' strategy. Third, I look at the 1974 split between ETA Politico-Military and ETA Military and the associated debate over movement centralization. I conclude by

considering why movement centralization succeeded in Ireland and failed in the Basque Country, as well as how movement structures impacted conflict prolongation and conflict resolution.

## Movement-expansion and armed struggle

In analyzing the relationship between social movements and clandestine armed groups, i.e. 'terrorist organizations,' movement scholars have systematically mapped out one particular trajectory: *social movement to armed group* (Alimi, 2011; Alimi et al., 2015; Della Porta, 2006; Della Porta & Tarrow, 1987; Zwerman et al., 2000).[1] Movement demobilization in these cases fuels armed struggle, as hardliners use violence to reignite the struggle's flame. Animated by an ethic of pure conviction (Weber, 2009; [1920]), militants broadly *disembed* from their social milieux by forming organizations underground. Terrorism scholars have highlighted the near ubiquity among armed groups of the 'cellular' model of clandestine units organized into a loosely structured hierarchy (Helfstein, 2009; Jackson, 2006; Shapiro, 2005; Wolf, 1987). These groups, however, face severe constraints and cannot use normal organizational means to impose rules, enforce compliance, and monitor members (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Jones, 2008; Enders & Su, 2007; Shapiro & Siegel, 2012). Armed groups thus often use violence for organizational ends such as fundraising (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2008; Siquiera, 2005), recruitment (De Mesquita, 2008; Gutfraind, 2009), and internal communication (Chai, 1993).

But if clandestine violence exacerbates the difficulties armed groups face, it is counterintuitive and counterproductive for these groups to rely solely on violence to address organizational problems and is likely to instead accelerate their demise (Wieviorka, 2004). Survival is, after all, an imperative for revolutionary organizations, including armed groups (Crenshaw, 1987; Selznick, 1952). The exclusive reliance on violence to solve organizational problems may explain why many armed groups do not persist long (Cronin, 2009). Violence as an organizational tool, given its inherent limitations, cannot explain the long careers of armed groups such as the IRA and ETA.

An alternative mechanism for ensuring organizational reproduction and armed struggle's persistence is the development of *politico-military movement structures* through the formation of allied aboveground movement organizations, the coordination of nonviolent political action with armed struggle, and the creation of a 'movement' identity based around strategic goals and legitimacy claims. Developing movement structures not only addresses organizational problems, but augments low-level violence through collective action expanded into new domains, while offsetting the 'terrorist' label by representing the armed group as the vanguard of a popular movement.

Developing politico-military movement structures is a strategic choice. Armed groups and nonviolent movement actors face similar dilemmas (Ganz, 2000; Jasper, 2004; Minkoff, 1999), but the inherent limitations of armed struggle are critical to armed groups' decision-making. The founding generation of clandestine armed groups are often, in Marx's terminology, 'alchemists of revolution' who believe that violence can create revolutionary conditions (Rubenstein, 1987). Militants soon learn, however, that clandestine violence is inherently limited. Violence demobilizes supporters, while armed groups are often decimated by ensuing repression. Militants may choose to escalate in hopes that more violence will spur revolution – though this is likely to lead to further demobilization and organizational demise.

Militants may opt instead for a long-term attritional model more suited to their limited capacities (Kydd & Walter, 2006; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2007). The attritional model, however, requires secure modes for organizational reproduction, forcing groups to disembed from their milieux through the adoption of more insular structures.[2] But disembedding impedes organizational reproduction in two ways. First, removing the armed group from its milieu increases its political marginalization and diminishes the symbolic impact of its violence. Under such conditions the struggle comes to be seen, according to ETA Politico-Military leader Eduardo Moreno, 'as a private war beyond the interests of the masses' (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, 1980, p. 129).[3] Second, while bolstering security, disembedding exacerbates organizational problems such as recruitment, alliance-formation, public communication, and mass mobilization in support of armed struggle.

Developing politico-military movement structures offsets disembedding's limitations in three ways. First, nonviolent collective action augments armed groups' violence by expanding the struggle into new domains. Second, by adopting 'movement' forms and repertoires, armed groups' supporters provide armed groups some measure of political legitimacy, thus offsetting the symbolic ramifications of the 'terrorist' label. Finally, forming aboveground movement organizations[4] assists in addressing organizational problems:

*Recruitment*: Going underground cuts armed groups off from the recruits needed to replace killed or captured militants, as well as from those who provide safe houses, intelligence, and financial contributions. Through aboveground movement organizations, armed groups can securely identify and screen recruits, as well as obtain resources, funds, and intelligence (Buesa, 2011; Hannigan, 1985; Llera, 1992). Associated organizations also socialize individuals into the culture of insurgency prior to joining the armed group. Movement organizations can also be beneficial when the armed group has *too many* recruits, who can be channeled into allied organizations.

*Alliance-Formation*: Clandestinity hinders armed groups' capacity for engagement with other political actors, increasing their marginalization. Aboveground movement organizations can provide links to the political field and foster engagement with allies and rivals (Dudouet, 2010; Neumann, 2003; Pettyjohn, 2009; Richards, 2003). Allied movement organizations, though stigmatized by their association with 'terrorists,' possess enough legitimacy for engagement with nonviolent political forces, thus expanding armed groups' domestic and international political networks.

*Propaganda*: Though clandestine violence is often expressive, armed groups have little control over the interpretation of their actions (Cordes, 2001; Stohl & Stohl, 2011). Communiqués and tweets are often framed in line with the state's preferred narrative, reinforcing the marginalization of armed groups and further limiting their support base. Movement-associated media can provide a counter-narrative to the terrorism frame that dominates political discourse, giving armed groups a weapon in legitimacy struggles. Movement-linked media also socializes supporters and recruits into the insurgency's culture, providing them ready-made justifications for violence.

*Mobilization*: Mobilization is beyond the capacity of armed groups, though it is often central to their strategies (Rubenstein, 1987). This contributes to armed groups' marginalization and illegitimacy. Parallel collective action can thus be used to demonstrate that armed groups, rather than being illegitimate 'terrorists,' are vanguards of broad-based movements. Movement organizations can mobilize supporters through conventional or contentious means such as electoral campaigns or public protests (Irvin, 1999; Pedahzur, Weinberg, & Perliger, 2009; Weinberg, 1991). Mobilization also expands the struggle into new arena, bolstering and often transcending clandestine violence.

Movement structures enable armed groups' reproduction by addressing organizational and political problems. But militants must also face issues relating to interorganizational authority and movement centralization. The impact of movement structure on political effectiveness has been widely examined by social movement scholars (Gamson, 1975; Jenkins & Eckert, 1986; Polletta, 2012; Staggenborg, 1988; Taylor, 1989; Zald & Ash, 1966), but politico-military movements face a specific problem: how to coordinate armed and unarmed activism (Berti, 2013, pp. 19–24; Della Porta, 2013, pp. 171–2). Centralization is optimal for achieving movement goals by controlling violence, thereby facilitating the political wing's development. But centralization produces new risks. Allies charged with political tasks may be vulnerable to arrest given their relatively public activism, while armed-group-directed 'front' organizations can make armed groups vulnerable to police disruption – hindering the development of both wings of politico-military movements.

Decentralized structures may be devised in which movement organizations agree on strategy but operate with few links to the armed group itself. Decentralization, while increasing security, creates coordination problems. Lacking centralized control, insurgents may create other means for coordinating violent and nonviolent activism. Members of armed groups may infiltrate existing organizations, though this can create intra-movement acrimony if it provokes repression against infiltrated groups. Semi-formal coordination is also possible, such as umbrella organizations in which armed groups are

members or are represented by others, though even such relatively indirect links may create organizational insecurity.

Regardless of interorganizational form, this expansion takes the explicit guise of a *movement* to offset the impact of the 'terrorist' label. Organizational form, after all, is itself a strategic legitimacy claim (Clemens, 1993). By representing themselves as part of a 'movement' – e.g. the *Irish Republican Movement* or the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco* – using 'movement' repertoires – public protests, propaganda efforts, legal campaigns – armed groups attempt to exhibit their political legitimacy through popular support. If successful, the armed group draws both practically and symbolically from movement structures, thereby prolonging violent conflicts. Irish republicans and Basque separatists consciously exhibited the 'properties' of social movements, i.e. 'collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities' (Tarrow, 1998, p. 9); and their characteristic 'elements,' i.e. organized campaigns; contentious repertoires; and demonstrations of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment (Tilly, 2004, pp. 3–4). Like nonviolent actors, Irish and Basque militants intentionally and pragmatically adopted these features in the effort to acquire legitimacy as a 'movement,' albeit with the further goal of offsetting the 'terrorist' label.

## The Irish republican movement

The Provisional republican movement's expansion was provoked in the mid-seventies by changes in the Northern Irish security environment, which forced the IRA to adopt an attritional military strategy and a cellular model. To offset ensuing social and political marginalization, a parallel *reembedding* process was initiated through the expansion of republicanism. The following investigates republican leaders' decision to implement movement structures. First, I consider how changes in the security environment pushed the IRA to disembed by adopting a cellular model. Second, I examine the arguments made by republican leaders concerning republicanism's expansion under the IRA Army Council's direction. Finally, I consider Sinn Fein's development during the 80s as the principle component of movement-expansion.

### *Context*

'Going political' has long fractured Irish republicans. Following yet another failed military effort, the 1957–1962 'Border Campaign,' the IRA's Dublin leadership attempted to transform the organization into a Marxist-Leninist vanguard directing popular struggles throughout Ireland. Republican purists, however, feared that leaders were 'running down' the armed struggle. The 1968–1969 Northern Irish Catholic civil rights campaign and ensuing sectarian violence exacerbated these tensions, leading to the 1969 schism within the 'Official' IRA and the founding of the Provisional IRA – which quickly became Northern Ireland's most effective armed group.

By the mid-seventies, however, counterterrorist efforts increasingly disrupted the IRA. After the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) proved unable to maintain security, London deployed troops in 1969 and instituted widespread internment in 1971, which proved ineffective and damaged London's credibility among Catholics. A reformed law-and-order approach, 'criminalization,' was thus introduced in the mid-seventies. The RUC was to now lead counterterrorist efforts, with British troops relegated to support functions, while juryless courts, notorious for their reliance on informants, were introduced to prosecute terrorist offenses (Tonge, 2013, pp. 95–97). After 1975, arrests and prosecutions of IRA members, including seasoned veterans, escalated (Sanders, 2011, p. 340).

These developments discredited Provisional leaders who had since the early 70s promised that just 'one more push' would force British withdrawal. In opposition, militants led by Gerry Adams argued for an overhaul of the IRA's strategy and organization. The IRA shifted from an insurrectional to a more viable low-level attritional strategy, 'the Long War,' requiring the adoption of a disembedded cellular

structure. In addition, republicanism was expanded through Sinn Fein's development to provide the IRA with mechanisms for organizational reproduction and to augment its low-level violence with organized political agitation (O'Brien, 1999; Whalen, 2006).

### *Disembedding and reembedding*

When the Provisional IRA was founded in 1969, it used the IRA's traditional brigade structure of large units organized into a geographical hierarchy. By the mid-seventies, however, this structure proved vulnerable. The IRA was thus reformed and streamlined for an attritional campaign. According to a 1977 Army Council report, the IRA was 'burdened with an inefficient infrastructure of commands, brigades, battalions and companies,' requiring the 'building of a new Irish Republican Army' (Coogan, 2000, p. 465). A model of clandestine cells organized within a hierarchical chain-of-command was instituted beginning in 1977. The auxiliary woman's organization, Cumann na mBan also went underground, as did the youth group Na Fianna Éireann, whose members were to 'be educated and organized decisively to pass into the IRA cell structure when of age' (2000, p. 465).

The cell structure, while secure, isolated the IRA, creating organizational problems that imperiled its long-term campaign. Militants argued that this could be offset by 'building around [the IRA] new surfaces and protective groups' (*Republican News*, Aug. 21, 1976). Expansion was essential to the struggle's perpetuation, according to Gerry Adams:

> If we have only a local Unit in an area, the Brit wins by isolating or removing that unit from the people. If that Unit is part of an aggressive Republican or People's Resistance Structure, the Brit must remove everyone connected, from schoolchildren to customers in the co-ops, from paper-sellers to street committees, before he can defeat us. (Nov. 29, 1975)

The IRA training manual, *IRA Green Book*, reiterated this:

> If … we have an area with a unit of IRA volunteers and nothing else: no Sinn Fein Cumann, no Green Cross committee, no local involvement, etc. after a period regardless of how successful they have been against the British, they end up in jail leaving no structure behind: no potential for resistance, recruits, education, or general enhancing of support. (1977, p. 9)

Militants looked to 'people's organizations' as a model for movement-formation. Following Northern Ireland's late 60s' destabilization, Catholics established limited self-government through these ad hoc associations. Adams, who had been active in these groups, saw them as ideal vehicles for expansion:

> People's organizations have increased as new contingencies have arisen. Now we have housing committees, street committees, defense committees, prisoners aid committees, and credit unions. We have sporting, cultural and Gaelic language organizations busy at the grass roots level, peoples' taxis and cooperative schemes progressing and enlarging. All people's organizations–all carrying out necessary functions–all for the welfare of the people–all divorced or easily divorced from the Brit Administration. (*Republican News*, Nov. 29, 1975)

These groups 'would allow people not normally involved in the struggle…to participate in the overall war effort by providing an outlet for everyone's potential' (Feb. 19, 1977). The IRA would ultimately benefit:

> Our struggle is not merely an armed one and there are others who are deeply committed to the revolution who for reasons of their own are not engaged in actual armed conflict. The active support given by such people is invaluable … [adding] to the momentum of the revolution and ensures a continuous growth in the number of people who are brought into contact with the struggle and who in turn propagate Republican philosophy. (Jul. 30, 1977)

The *IRA Green Book* echoed this:

> Resistance must be channeled into active and passive support with an on-going process through our actions, our education programmes, our policies, of attempting to turn the passive supporter into a dump holder, a member of the movement, a paper seller etc. with the purpose of building protective support barriers between the enemy and ourselves, thus curbing the enemy's isolation policy. And of course the more barriers there are, the harder it is for the enemy to get us while at the same time we increase the potential for active support in its various forms. (1977, p. 9)

This interorganizational matrix would provide the IRA security, while offsetting disembedding's limitations through movement-expansion – under the IRA Army Council's direction.

The IRA Army Council's authority was grounded in republican legitimism. For purists, Ireland's only legitimate government was the Sinn Fein-dominated 1919–1922 'all-Ireland' *Daíl Éireann*. Following the 1921 partition of Northern Ireland and the 1921–1922 Irish Civil War, militant republicans refused to recognize the Dublin and Belfast parliaments, seeing the 1919 *Daíl* as Ireland's legitimate government. In 1938, the remaining *Daíl* members transferred this legitimacy to the Army Council – making it Ireland's 'true government' among purists (Sanders, 2011, pp. 4–6). Following the 1969 split, the all-Ireland *Daíl*'s last living member passed this legitimacy to the Provisional IRA Army Council (White, 1993, p. 57). Given this legacy, the Army Council's 'permanent leadership' was used to legitimize republicanism's expansion (Moloney, 2003, pp. 156–7). Interorganizational control was also practical. One militant wrote, 'the Republican Movement can only succeed under the direct revolutionary leadership of the Republican Army' (*Republican News*, Aug. 21, 1976). In 1977, the Army Council ordered that 'Army men must be in total command of all the movement … Sinn Fein must come under Army organizers at all levels … Sinn Fein should be radicalized (under Army direction) … [and] be directed to infiltrate other organizations to win support for and sympathy to the Movement' (Coogan, 2000, p. 467).

Centralization was necessary to ensure that 'going political' not undermine armed struggle, though some control over violence was necessary to enable movement-formation. 'Uncontrolled violence helps no one,' Gerry Adams warned, 'Let us ensure that our revolutionary violence is controlled and disciplined' (*Republican News*, Sept. 11, 1976). The *IRA Green Book* commanded militants to 'ensure that by our personal conduct and by the collective conduct of our struggle that we alienate as few of our supporters as possible' (1977, p. 7). But politics would not supplant armed struggle. As Adams stressed, 'I'm not advocating a diversion from the war effort. Far from it. I'm advocating an extension of it' (*Republican News*, Oct. 18, 1975).

## Expanding republicanism

The Adams clique gained control over the Army Council through two organizational developments. The first was the Northern Command's formation. Since the IRA's 1921 founding, Dublin had been the group's center-of-command. In 1976, the IRA was reorganized into the Northern Command directing Northern military operations and the Republic of Ireland's Southern Command restricted to logistics, giving northerners operational control over the IRA (O'Brien, 1999, pp. 109–110). The second development was the Revolutionary Council's creation, distributing authority among the Army Council, General Headquarters in Dublin, and Northern commanders – again benefitting Belfast. By 1977, the Adams clique had gained influence on the Army Council, due partially to the Revolutionary Council's support – which thereafter faded from existence (Moloney, 2003, pp. 145–154). Now in the leadership, the clique was positioned to direct movement-expansion.

Despite the allure of 'people's organizations,' republicanism developed largely through Sinn Fein, its growth propelled by political events. To prevent the breakdown of the 1975–1976 IRA ceasefire, 'incident centers' staffed by Sinn Fein were established, increasing the party's profile. IRA commander Brendan Hughes argued that 'it was the relationship between the British Army and the IRA back then that led to the first public expression through these incidents centers of republicans coming out of the backstreets, the smoke-filled rooms' (Feeney, 2002, p. 276). The 1981 prison hunger strike spurred further development, as republicans joined Irish moderates to support strike-leader Bobby Sands' 1981 Westminster electoral campaign, creating 'H-Block committees' throughout Ireland – which later became Sinn Fein offices (Moloney, 2003, p. 215).

Throughout republicanism's expansion, efforts to establish specialized groups continued, but the IRA and Sinn Fein remained dominant – facilitating the Army Council's centralized control. The army-party model contrasts with the Basque separatist movement, which consists of numerous organizations – labor unions, neighborhood associations, youth groups. ETA remained the movement's effective vanguard, but no organization implemented full control over both wings of Basque separatism since its development in the late 70s.

## The Basque separatist movement

The Basque separatist movement's expansion differed from the republican experience in four ways. First, whereas republicans adopted movement structures in response to a changing security environment, ETA was *founded as a social movement*. During ETA's first decade, however, repression hindered the development of all but ETA's 'Military Front.' Second, whereas the IRA adopted the cellular model well after initiating its campaign, ETA implemented this structure at its founding. Following the 1968 initiation of violence, however, ETA's Military Front delinked from the rest of the group and its milieu to ensure organizational security. Third, whereas Irish republicans expanded through existing groups, Basque separatists had to create organizations whole cloth. Finally, whereas republicans implemented centralization under the Army Council, separatists fractured over interorganizational centralization, resulting in rival movement models.

The following examines the 1974 split and subsequent struggle between ETA Politico-Military and ETA Military over 'correct' movement form. First, I look at problems ETA faced on the eve of Spanish democratization – its undeveloped political apparatus and encroaching 'militarization' of the struggle – leading to the adoption of both an attritional military strategy and movement structures. I then consider the debate between rivals over centralization and organizational autonomy. Finally, I examine ETA Politico-Military's demise and separatism's crystallization within ETA Military's decentralized structure.

### *Context*

When founded in 1959, ETA was to be a social movement rather than an armed group (Letamendia, 1994a, p. 257). ETA was organized into four specialized 'fronts' – culture, labor, propaganda, and military – directed by ETA's leadership. This structure's development coincided with the Franco regime's mid-sixties liberalization, which encouraged widespread mobilization among Basques. The regime responded with characteristic repression, instituting martial law in the Basque Country seven times between 1967 and 1975 (Bruni, 1987, p. 227). Repression against ETA, however, fell disproportionately on its semi-clandestine political fronts, while ETA's Military Front developed unimpeded within its French Basque sanctuary (Giacopuzzi, 1997, p. 17).

ETA's underdevelopment on the eve of Spanish democratization provoked the 1974 schism and the creation of rival organizations, ETA Military and ETA Politico-Military. Both agreed that collective action must augment armed struggle and that some 'political apparatus' was essential for mobilizing ETA's substantial social support (Ibarra, 1987, pp. 114–115). The political apparatus's form, however, divided militants. Politico-Military strategist Eduardo Moreno argued that ETA's overarching problem was the lack of 'unified and genuine direction of the operations of two sectors organized by militants with distinct political ideals and mentalities' (Amigo, 1978, p. 305). Others argued that repression prevented such centralization. As one strategist wrote, 'an organization engaged in armed struggle faces absolute repression and must endure constant setbacks, making the creation of stable mass organizations impossible … The acronym 'E.T.A.' is a guarantee of intense repression' (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, 1980, p. 58).

ETA's uneven development, furthermore, threatened to militarize the struggle. In 1974, a group of defectors warned of the 'dangerous militaristic stance that has reigned within the armed wing … [which] seeks to militarize the organization' (Bruni, 1987, pp. 207–208). Politico-Military also warned that unless linked to the mass struggle, 'the armed group will enter its own dynamic, alienating itself more and more from the masses, until it descends into militarism' (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, 1980, p. 61). The influential militant Eduardo Moreno argued, 'The armed struggle will transform into a confrontation between the state and a marginalized group … with the masses merely observing as passive spectators' (Amigo, 1978, p. 279).

Encroaching militarization influenced the modification of ETA's military strategy, which made developing movement structures more urgent. During the 60s, ETA developed the insurrectional 'action-repression' model: violence would provoke state repression, radicalizing the masses, culminating

in revolution. With democratization and demobilization looming, ETA Military abandoned this model in 1978, adopting a more practical low-level attritional strategy to force negotiations with Madrid (Ibarra, 1987). ETA Politico-Military, on the other hand, did not develop a coherent military strategy. Officially, Politico-Military argued that violence would *augment* mass struggle in the 'progressive weakening and destabilization of the oligarchic power' (Giacopuzzi, 1997, p. 77), though ETA's traditional insurrectional model remained influential (1997, pp. 98–100). Indeed, ambitious attacks fractured allies, contributing to Politico-Military's ultimate demise.

### *Centralization vs. decentralization*

The rivals agreed that the mass and armed struggles were one, though ETA Politico-Military maintained that a single vanguard must direct both. According to one strategist, 'There is only one way to build mass action: through an organization that unites both forms of action, a politico-military organization' (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna,1980, p. 61). The failure to develop political structures stemmed from contradictions in 'the practical and organizational articulation of the mass struggle and the armed struggle' (1980, p. 336). Coordination through greater centralization would correct this: 'Our activity in the mass struggle will determine our armed activity, and our military activity will in turn drive and orient our activity in the mass struggle in a constant dialectic between the two within a strategic and tactical framework devised by a single leadership' (1980, p. 346).

ETA Politico-Military insisted the group be 'firmly organized and centralized, like a Marxist-Leninist party' (1980, p. 336), yet compartmentalized through 'total separation at the base level between militants dedicated to the mass struggle and militants dedicated to the armed struggle' (1980, p. 345). Tactical and strategic oversight was essential:

> … when an action is to be undertaken in any field of struggle within a zone, one must always consider the effects of repression on the development of the struggles in other areas of the same zone … to judge if an action taken at a given moment will have a positive or negative effect on the overall development of the struggle. (1980, pp. 320–321)

Responsible commanders would ensure that 'inopportune military violence, impervious to the actual development of the struggle in other zones' not produce 'stagnation or even regression in the development of the struggle' (1980, p. 321). Furthermore, centralization was critical as Spanish democratization would cause 'unity to become very fragile and to maintain it will require greater control and, therefore, much stronger centralization' (1980, p. 336).

ETA Politico-Military believed that as 'there is only one political struggle there should be one single organization' directing it (1980, p. 344). Therefore, 'to separate the armed struggle from the mass struggle through the creation of separate organizations is to create an artificial divide in what is a single struggle' (1980, p. 344). Without centralization, the struggle would devolve into 'a situation in which a radicalized group exists alongside masses that are not even minimally radicalized … believing themselves outside a struggle they see as senseless' (1980, p. 328). ETA Military's plan to abandon 'politics' was thus 'irresponsibility approaching treason' (1980, p. 346).

ETA Military, formed by Military Front veterans, drew from experience in calling for decentralization to insure armed struggle's perpetuation alongside movement development (Giacopuzzi, 1997, pp. 73–74). ETA Military leader José Miguel Beñaran argued that centralization had proven unfeasible with the previous decade's fronts model, which had been 'too open for the development of effective armed activity' (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, 1980, p. 81). Lax 'norms of security' and the 'mixing of fronts' had exposed the group to repression (1980, p. 58), which 'impeded the political consolidation of the masses, as well as the continuation of armed struggle' (1980, p. 81). Therefore, 'so long as a front of the organization engages in armed struggle, the rest of the organization must suffer the repression it provokes' (1980, p. 104). Only 'an organic separation between mass activity and armed activity … will guarantee the development of a political base supporting the Organization' (1980, p. 15).

ETA Military proposed 'the compartmentalization of apparatuses and action groups operating with tactical autonomy within a general homogenous framework' (1980, p. 14). Its own militants would

'separate ourselves from the mass apparatus, tactically limiting our functions to the development of armed struggle,' thus offsetting 'the effects of repression on mass organizations, facilitating stable development and capacity for maneuvering' (1980, pp. 58–59). Disembedding would also allow ETA to limit its size, benefitting allies: 'we have demonstrated great interest in developing the mass struggle, closing our doors to many militants and directing them to [newly-formed separatist groups] LAB, EHAS, LAK, LAIA, and even the Politico-Military organization' (1980, p. 17).

ETA Military understood that decentralization problematized interorganizational coordination. It rejected 'double militancy' whereby ETA members would infiltrate allied groups, as infiltration would 'directly implicate parties in the armed struggle and these parties will come to face the same repression' (1980, p. 21). The group argued that informal 'bilateral relationships' between ETA members and aboveground allies represented 'the most appropriate formula for the direction and control by the military organization over the parties' (1980, pp. 20–12). Personal ties would allow ETA to influence – *even control* – allies in lieu of interorganizational centralization.

### *Expanding separatism*

ETA Politico-Military's centralized structure immediately exhibited the limitations of which ETA Military had warned. In 1975, police infiltration caused the arrest or flight of eighty percent of the group (Giacopuzzi, 1997, p. 58). Politico-Military was reorganized, but factionalism caused the military wing's 1977 defection to ETA Military. The group's military arm was again rebuilt, and in 1977 the group's political wing, the Party of the Basque Revolution (EIA), was formed. Creating a unified leadership, however, proved difficult: the wings were soon operating under separate structures (Egido, 1993, pp. 67–85). Conflict within the virtual organization came to a head following the 1980–1981 negotiations between EIA leaders and the Spanish Interior over ETA Politico-Military's disbandment, whose members broadly rejected the deal, causing widespread defections to ETA Military and allied organizations (Fernández, 2011).

ETA Military's decentralized model proved more resilient. Following the split, ETA Military assisted in forming numerous organizations, including the People's Revolutionary Socialist Party (HASI) in 1977. In 1980, HASI and three other parties formed the coalition Herri Batasuna, which by decade's end became a party in its own right. ETA Military supported the formation of the youth group Jarrai and the newspaper *Egin*, which was supported as well by ETA Politico-Military. In 1975, the two rivals and their respective allies formed Patriotic Socialist Coordination (KAS) to synchronize political and military action. With the 1977 departure of Politico-Military and EIA, KAS aligned with ETA Military. Radical separatism's crystallization around ETA Military culminated with ETA Politico-Military's 1985 disbandment.

This did not, however, end the struggle over centralization. Beginning in 1983, KAS attempted to centralize control over separatism's political wing – though not over ETA – producing intra-movement conflict (Letamendia, 1994b, pp. 116–118). By decade's end, militants were calling for greater organizational autonomy to attract younger recruits repelled by separatism's militaristic image (Ó Broin, 2004, pp. 190–209). Movement organizations embraced more 'horizontal and open' structures 'in contrast to the monolithic and vertical forms on which traditional and even leftist parties rely' (Herri Batasuna, 1991, p. 5). In the early 90s, ETA allegedly attempted to impose intra-movement control (Buesa, 2011, pp. 71–91), though many believe this was a convenient legal cover for the movement's criminalization (Whitfield, 2014, pp. 64–65). Whatever control ETA may have established was undone by Spanish courts: by 2003, virtually every separatist political organization had been criminalized.

## Conclusion

Organizational development is not an automatic process, but rather a strategic decision (Jenkins, 1983, p. 541). Strategic decision-making, of course, must be analyzed in relation to structural conditions (Koopmans, 2005). For armed groups, this decision is shaped by the strategic and practical limitations

of clandestine armed struggle. Though a subject for systematic investigation, it is useful to consider why centralization succeeded in Ireland yet failed in the Basque Country. Geographically, the Republic of Ireland's countryside provided fertile grounds for clandestine coordination. The miniscule French Basque region once provided separatists a similar environment, but French counterterrorist efforts since the mid-eighties made this base inhospitable (Domínguez, 1998, p. 148). State decisions impacted the decision-making of armed groups in other ways. British-Irish counterterrorism targeted the IRA's rank-and-file, while reputed Army Council members, including Sinn Fein leaders, were rarely subject to arrest or prosecution. Repression against nonviolent Basque separatists has been more concerted, hindering the development of stable interorganizational structures, centralized or decentralized.

Experience and ideology also impact movement-formation. The Army Council's authority within republicanism has deep historical roots, with purists seeing it as the 'legitimate government' of Ireland, while military dominance over politicos is a legacy of the 1921–1922 Irish Civil War (O'Brien, 1999, p. 122). Basque separatists, on the other hand, learned from experience that centralization was unviable in Spain. Ideology also impacted movement development, especially among Basque militants who, unlike Provisionals, identify with the Continental left. While variants of Marxism were dominant during the 60s, the New Left drove the schisms of the 70s. Leftwing currents were less influential among republicans, while Sinn Fein's embrace of leftist politics was more gradual (Bean, 2007; Maillot, 2005).

Politico-military movement-formation is critical for armed groups' reproduction – and therefore for prolonging violent conflicts. A cursory examination of postwar Western Europe suggests that movement formation fosters prolongation. Most groups generally followed the disembedding-to-demise model described by Della Porta and Tarrow (1987). More durable groups such as the IRA and ETA developed movement structures alongside the clandestine. Further evidence of movement structure's impact on conflict prolongation can be found in the cases of Hamas and Hezbollah, whose politico-military model is augmented by a social service wing (Berti, 2013; Gleis & Berti, 2012; Wiktorowicz, 2004). Indeed, auxiliary 'civilian' apparatuses facilitate the maintenance of guerrilla armies as well (Goldman, 2013), suggesting that parallel structures may be crucial for perpetuating civil wars, as well as 'terrorist' conflicts.

Movement structures may also contribute to ending conflicts (Duhart, 2016). A developed political wing can provide credible partners for negotiation, allowing governments to make peace without 'talking to terrorists.' Clandestine armed groups, with their limited violence, require the specialized skills of nonviolent allies to pressure states into engaging. Furthermore, interorganizational structures shape peace efforts, as demonstrated in the Irish and Basque cases. Republicanism's centralized authority structures allowed Sinn Fein leaders to navigate the peace process and manage intra-movement dissidence. Basque separatists, in contrast, have been unsuccessful peacemakers due to chronic coordination failures. In recent years, however, the Basque conflict has changed. ETA declared an end to its armed struggle in 2011. Spanish–French counterterrorist efforts have decimated the group, but pressure from its allies left ETA with no option but disengagement. Thus, the development of movement structures, though designed for perpetuating violent conflicts, ultimately contribute to ending them.



## Notes

1. This trajectory has been partially examined in case studies cited in this article (Bean, 2007; Domínguez, 1998; Feeney, 2002; Giacopuzzi, 1997; Hannigan, 1985; Irvin, 1999; Letamendia, 1994a,b; Llera, 1992; Neumann, 2003; Ó Broin, 2004; Richards, 2003), though many focus on the army-party relationship rather than movement structure. Mine is an attempt to systematize and expand these findings within the context of social movement analysis.
2. Whether all ties to the aboveground are cut varies between and within armed groups. Some links are inevitably maintained even without parallel movement structures.
3. All translations from Spanish and Basque are the author's.
4. An 'aboveground movement organization' is 'a complex, or formal organization that identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement … [and] attempts to implement these goals' (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 1218); qualified as 'aboveground' in contrast to 'underground' armed groups. These take various forms, from semi-legal protest organizations to formal political parties.

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