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Punishment Attacks - Recent Trends.

Recent media reports have concentrated on an alleged upsurge in the numbers of punishment attacks in Northern Ireland in January 1999. These reports have various sources, the most persistently quoted being the group Families Against Intimidation and Terror. Their statistics have been frequently quoted by Unionist and Conservative spokespersons on the issue in recent weeks. The following is an attempt to put the current level of punishment attacks into perspective and to assess the accuracy of recent claims about the upsurge.

Statistics for January 1999

Anglo-Irish Division statistics (from daily situation reports and newspaper reports of incidents) indicate a total of 10 shootings and 15 beatings. RUC figures say there were 12 shootings and 29 beatings (broken down to 5 republican and 7 loyalist shootings and 17 loyalist and 12 republican beatings). The RUC statistics relating to January 1999 are particularly distorted due to the inclusion of an incident which involved seven people on January 29. The incident, involving loyalists and drugs, did not fit the pattern of a paramilitary attack, and was more in the nature of a fracas. FAIT's claims vary between 10 and 12 shootings, and 24 to 27 beatings.

January 1999

	Republican		Loyalist		Total	
	shootings	beatings	shootings	beatings	Shootings	beatings
FAIT	5	12	7	15	12	27
Division	4	7	6	8	10	15
RUC	5	12	7	17	12	29

Comparisons with republican attacks in 1998

Using the RUC figures, this places January 1999 as a higher than usual month for punishment attacks, but it is not a significant departure from the general pattern. In January 1999 there were 5 republican shootings, as opposed to 3 in December, 3 in November, and 1 in October 1998. In January of 1998 there were 7 republican shootings, and 4 in each month of February, March and April. Concerning republican beatings,

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there were 12 in January 1999, which does represent an increase when compared to October, November and December 1998, with 4, 5, and 2 beatings respectively, but it is an average figure, when compared with June or July of 1998, with 11 and 7 beatings.

Comparisons with republican attacks in 1997

The total number of republican attacks in January 1999 (17) can be favourably compared with the early months of 1997 when there were 13, 14 and 11 attacks, and also with July 1997, just before the resumption of the ceasefire, when there were 16 attacks

Comparison with early 1990s

The total number of republican attacks in January is significantly lower than the numbers in 1995, which in February was 24, in May 16, and in October 21. This fall is typical of the overall trend since 1996, which was the year with the highest ever figures for punishment attacks. This peak must, however, be seen in the context of the general increase in the numbers of punishment beatings since the first IRA ceasefire in 1994.

Discrepancies and explanations

The reason for the significant discrepancies between the figures from the Division, the RUC and FAIT are many - the first point to be made is that the division's figures rely on what becomes public knowledge, and do not take account of incidents reported to the police after more than a day's delay (or those not reported to the police). The RUC statistics are also, of course, subject to question, particularly because of the reporting issue (as outlined above), but this is countered by the fact that the RUC can often become aware of an incident without an official report being made, e.g. through ambulance call-out logs. The statistics provided from the RUC for the month of January 1999 have been subject to considerable revision (changing from 30 attacks on 1 February, to 41 on February 3) and this has led to media reports of 'a massive rise in attacks last month'. The figures provided by FAIT are inflated by their methods of recording information, given that they record each incident again each time a phone call or report is made about it. Their figures are also most often published in conjunction with information on intimidation and exile cases, (towards which the above caveats still apply), and by association, the impression is created of a mounting campaign but this does not, as

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indicated above, reflect the reality.

Trends in overall figures

Since the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, over seven hundred incidents of punishment shootings and beatings have been recorded in DFA statistics, an increase overall on previous patterns (see Fig.1). RUC statistics, contrary to the impression given in most public statements, indicate an overall fall in the numbers of attacks from 228 in 1997 to 209 in 1998. FAIT's figures are again inconsistent, and their total for 1998 was stated in various publications as 213, 234, 237 and 249. Figure 1 illustrates the general trend in punishment attacks over the past 27 years, with a sustained trough in the mid-1980s and an increase from 1994 which now appears to have stabilised. There is also a tendency in recent times for an increase in the proportion of punishment attacks by loyalist paramilitaries, and in recent months (July 1998 - January 1999), they have consistently outnumbered republican ones.

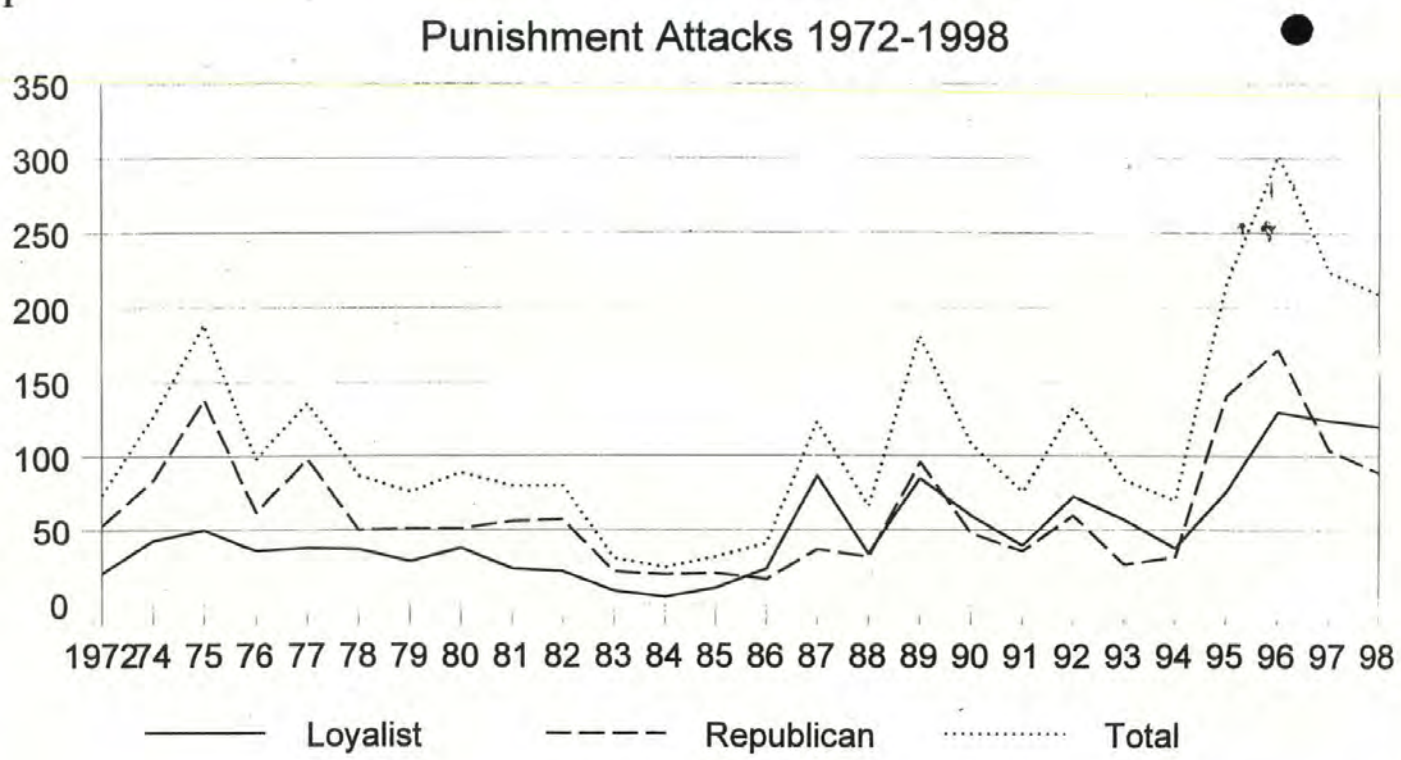
Conclusion

In considering January 1999, therefore, although there was some increase on the figures for punishment attacks for previous months, the increase is counted in single digits and the overall average is not unprecedentedly high. January 1999 is broadly comparable to most of the months of 1998.

Alma Ní Choigligh
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Anglo-Irish Division
4 February 1999

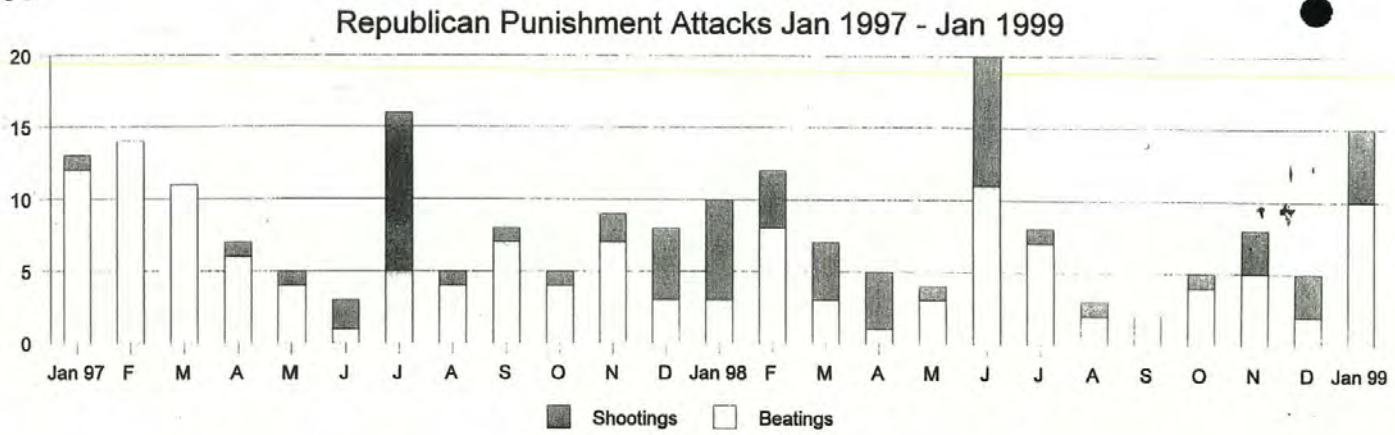
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Figure 1



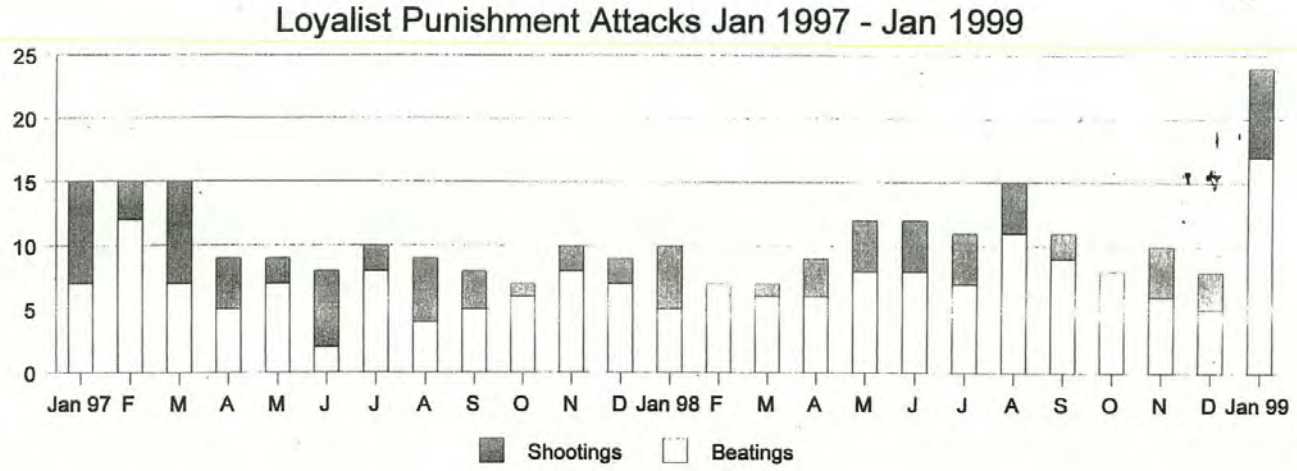
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Figure 2



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Figure 3



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