



Brazen and brutal, new era of gangland violence shows no sign of ending



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Security and Crime Editor

Gardaí now fear the Kinahan gang's determination to wipe out the rival Hutch faction is matched by their resources

As extreme as it was frequent, the gun violence that punctuated 2016 on the streets of Dublin will, barring a miracle, flow seamlessly into next year.

The fatal shootings and other planned assassinations that were thwarted or botched have become known as the Kinahan-Hutch feud.

But really it is an attempt by a slick international crime gang to wipe out a group of armed robbers and family members from Dublin's north inner city.

The imagery bookending the feuding year was remarkable.

In February men armed with AK47s and dressed in mock Garda tactical uniforms stormed a hotel in the first feud attack of the year, opening fire and murdering David Byrne.

And in recent weeks Garda members armed with high-powered weapons, dressed in tactical uniforms and equipped with a fleet of expensive Audi and BMW specialist policing vehicles were unveiled as the new Armed Response Unit (ARU) for Dublin.

The similarities between the appearance of the hotel killing team and the new Garda crack unit were uncanny; the Dublin criminals sourcing the helmets, body armour and firearms nine months before the city's gardaí.

The ARU's creation came as a direct response to the feud; a ramping up of Garda

preparedness to deal with the gangsters.

The unit's launch, at Garda headquarters a fortnight ago, also represented a strong show of force in front of a media scrum invited along to be sure the message was broadcast loud and clear.

With the two sides in the dispute no closer to settling their differences and the body count simply deepening the personal hatred fuelling the violence, there are tense and bloody times ahead.

Multiple fatalities

There are now real fears within the Garda that both sides are reaching out to European criminal contacts for assistance in carrying out high-impact attacks aimed at reaching the senior figures in the groups or to cause multiple fatalities in one strike.

To date 11 people have been shot dead as part of the "feud"; two in Spain, one in Meath and eight in Dublin.

A four-month break in the murders was shattered just before Christmas when Noel Kirwan was shot dead outside his partner's house in Clondalkin. He was gunned down because he was close to the Hutch family, rather than a gang member.

The killings began when Gary Hutch (34) was shot dead on September 24th, 2015, at an apartment block near Marbella in southern Spain.

He was murdered by the Kinahan drugs gang, of which he was once a member, after

it accused him of supplying information to the police. He had also tried to shoot a senior gang member.

Back in Dublin, his family had negotiated with gang leader Christy Kinahan for months in an effort to spare his life. Some €200,000 was paid and Gary Hutch was told he could return to Spain. However, the deal was reneged on and Hutch was murdered.

Three months later Dubliner Darren Kearns (34) was shot dead in a pub car park on Blackhorse Avenue, Dublin.

His murder on December 30th, 2015, has now been linked to the Kinahan gang. It believed Kearns and another criminal were behind a botched gun attack against its members in west Dublin weeks earlier.

It was not until February, when a killing team stormed a boxing match weigh-in at the Regency Hotel, north Dublin, that the Kinahan-Hutch feud was firmly planted into the public consciousness.

Footage from the weigh-in as the armed men stormed the room was captured on the mobile phones of those present and published online almost immediately.

And when the Irish public saw the newspapers the following day, the shock was complete. The front pages were filled with images of armed gangsters dressed as a Garda Swat team running to and from the Regency.

The unprecedented pictures brought home the horror and brazenness of the attack, thrusting it into the middle of the general election campaign.

The photographers were observing the weigh-in on the day, from outside the hotel, hoping to get shots of known gangland figures expected to be there. And when the extraordinary scenes unfolded the cameras were at the ready.

Surveillance

Much of the public debate centred on why crime journalists and photographers thought to be present but nobody in the Garda was carrying out surveillance despite Irish drugs wholesalers based in Spain expected to be there.

And the fact we were now into a very bloody new era on the streets of the capital in Dublin that is effectively the Irish side of the Kinahan gang," he said.

All of the killings to date bar one have been one-way traffic; Kinahan on Hutch.

A close associate of the Hutch family, Noel Duggan (55) was shot dead outside his home in Ratoath, Co Meath, on March 23rd.

Duggan, nicknamed "Kingsize", was heavily involved in cigarette smuggling and was very close to the Hutch family patriarch Gerry Hutch, the veteran criminal known as "The Monk".

Martin O'Rourke (24) was shot dead on Sheriff Street, Dublin 1, on April 14th after being mistaken for a Hutch family associate.

Michael Barr (35), a Hutch associate and dissident republican, was shot dead in a pub in Summerhill, Dublin 1, on April 25th.

Gareth Hutch was shot dead on May 24th on North Cumberland Street, Dublin.

David Douglas (55), Killala Road, Cabra, was shot in the doorway of a shop he ran with his wife on Bridgefoot Street, Dublin, on July 1st. He was a friend of Darren Kearns murdered by the Kinahans on December 30th, 2015.

The Kinahan gang believed Douglas and Kearns acted together on a botched gun attack in November, 2015, against its members.

Dublin City Council worker Trevor O'Neill was shot dead in Majorca on a family holiday with his wife and young children on August 17th after he was mistaken for a member of the Hutch family.

Between March and August the feud claimed one life a month.

There was then a lull, broken by the Christmas week killing of Noel Kirwan, as huge Garda resources have been applied, especially on the streets of Dublin's north inner city.

But the appetite for violence, especially

from the Kinahan gang, seems insatiable. And but for some luck and good police work, many more would be dead.

In September another member of the Hutch family - Eddie and Gerry Hutch's brother, John - was lucky to escape when a gunman opened fire on him outside his home on the North Circular Road, Dublin.

The 63-year-old managed to flee from the gunman who fired at him on the street only because a passerby threw a brick at the would-be killer and hit him.

Another of the brothers, Patrick Hutch, was placed under protective surveillance by the Garda over fears he too would be attacked by the Kinahans.

The targeting of Hutch brothers John and Patrick has occurred despite neither being involved in crime but simply because of their surname.

And while many in Dublin's north inner city community support the Hutch family, Garda sources say the Kinahan gang has "significant reach" into the area, with criminals living there willing to gather intelligence for them and even carry out shootings.

"A lot of what is happening in Dublin is being driven by David Byrne's associates," said one Garda source of the Regency Hotel victim.

"They are seething they'd be attacked in that way and they have to be seen to hit back hard and keep hitting."

Another source concurred but said



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drugs money was also a factor in the feud. "David Byrne was a member of a group in Dublin that is effectively the Irish side of the Kinahan gang," he said.

And while gang leader Christy Kinahan, his sons Christopher and Daniel and others in the organisation travelled extensively around the world from a Spanish base, Ireland remained important for them.

They are supplying the Irish drugs market and making a lot of money. But getting drug shipments to Ireland from Spain, or from South America via west Africa, is only part of the job.

Organised crime

"You have to have people here to take delivery of the drugs and split it into loads for sending to different criminals all over Dublin and in Limerick, Belfast, Sligo, all over the country," said the same source, who has been investigating organised crime in Dublin for well over a decade.

The fact David Byrne's associates "look after" much of that work and collected money meant they were an important cog in the Kinahan machine.

"So when somebody shoots David Byrne and tries to kill some of his associates on the same day in one attack, that's a challenge to them personally but it's a challenge to the Kinahan gang's Irish business dealings too."

The same source described the onslaught against the Hutches as a mix of revenge for Byrne's murder, general hatred for the Hutch family and the strongest signal possible to send to others who might dare to challenge them or their lucrative drugs wholesale business.

A newly retired former senior officer described the events of this year as "extraordinary", even in comparison to a decade of feuding in Dublin and Limerick from the end of the 1990s.

"Dressing up in mock Garda uniforms and going into a sports event at a busy hotel during the day with four or five armed peo-

■ **Gerry Hutch (the Monk) and Christy Kinahan. The two men have been locked in a bloody feud since Gary Hutch (34) was shot dead in Spain on September 24th, 2015.**

ple; something I have never seen," he said.

"And the attack on Eddie Hutch just a couple of days later and some of the others in areas where you had teams of gardaí on the streets doing checkpoints and so on; there seems to be no fear.

"There's plenty of people willing to carry out these attacks and no shortage of money to pay them. I think the Kinahan gang's ability to attack again and again and to have the resources to do it; that's new for Irish organised crime."

New departure

And another new departure gardaí are watching closely is the possibility criminals on both sides are trying to recruit underworld contacts abroad to aid them in carrying out what international law enforcement refers to as "a spectacular".

"You could probably class the Regency as a spectacular," said one source.

"And you would be watching to see would they do something like that again; shoot up an event and this time kill a large number of people."

Other security sources said criminal gangs abroad often used grenades and rocket launchers against their rivals, as well as bombs.

"We have had grenades used here before and rocket launchers have been found here before so it's not as crazy as you might think," said one Garda member.

Another source concurred, pointing to an operation in 2010 when an arsenal of weapons linked to Kinahan gang members in Dublin was found along with cocaine valued at €700,000.

On that occasion part of the arsenal found included two loaded rocket launchers that could be used to blow up buildings and even armoured vehicles.

Also in the haul was an AK74 assault rifle, an M8 grenade launcher and the two Russian-made RPG 22 rocket launchers with warheads fitted.

"There's no doubt the Kinahan gang are willing to kill a lot of people and that they have the resources," said one detective.

"Would they get help from some of their international colleagues for a spectacular in Ireland against the other side? You'd fear it."

"And if they keep going after the same people, would those people try to organise something big with help from abroad; you'd have to be conscious of it. Some of them live abroad and have huge criminal contacts there."

Of particular concern to the Garda was the recent seizure of a number of weapons in Dublin linked to the Kinahan gang.

The haul seized included two MP9 submachine guns and four magazines each containing 30 rounds of ammunition. The three handguns - one a .44 Magnum, another a .38 Smith & Wesson - were loaded and officers believe they had been prepared for an "imminent attack".

Brugger and Thomet MP9 submachine guns had never been seized in the Republic before and are an indication of the new weaponry being brought into the State for use in more violent and reckless attacks.

Ironically, but for the Kinahan-Hutch feud 2016 has been quiet for gangland. Without the feud killings, six people were shot dead this year.

Incidents involving the illegal discharging of a firearm or the illegal possession of a firearm are both down by just over 50 per cent since their peak in 2007-2008 and drug crime is down by a third in the same period.

But figures are little comfort to those mourning their dead after a year in which the Kinahan gang flexed its muscles on Irish streets. And the character of the men on both sides of the dispute guarantees more bloodshed.

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