

London Bridge attacks: Irish links

Non-white recruits and Arabic speakers are what the Garda needs, not more guns



Conor Lally
Security and Crime Editor

Force must engage in community policing and get to know members of minority groups

The public has, in general, welcomed the fact the three Islamic State extremists who struck in London last Saturday night were quickly shot dead by London Met armed officers.

The remains of the three men, who killed eight people and injured 48 in a stabbing attack, lay in the streets within eight minutes of the first 999 call having been received.

The inevitable questioning has begun in Ireland: "Would the Garda get there as quickly if the same thing happened here?"

The reality is that officers from the London Met may never get to, or end, such an attack within eight minutes again.

If police officers, including gardai, find themselves running to confront armed extremists slashing bystanders while wearing hoax explosive vests, savagery has already triumphed over decent society.

Getting as many Garda guns as possible on to an Irish street under attack is not unimportant. But that capability already exists in the form of the Emergency Response Unit and Armed Response Unit in Dublin and the Regional Support Units outside the capital.

The Garda staff associations believe all Garda members – including the unarmed uniformed members – need anti-terror training.

Basic tactics

This would include very basic tactics such as sealing off streets or clearing an area rapidly and safely should the need arise. It sounds like a good idea coming from the people who know the frontline best – those who form it.

But in the saturation news coverage since it emerged one of the London attackers – Moroccan-Libyan Rachid Redouane (30) – lived in Ireland



Garda Commissioner Nóirín O'Sullivan and Deputy Commissioner John Twomey at the International Association of Chiefs of Police forum Farmleigh House, Phoenix Park, yesterday
PHOTOGRAPH: COLIN KEEGAN/COLLINS

and got married here, it should not be forgotten that the risk of a major attack here is regarded as low.

A flood of highly visible armed gardai on to the streets would be there just for the sake of it, and in the absence of hard information stating a terror attack is coming. Such a move would only create panic.

What is needed is more Garda members engaging in community policing and getting to know minority groups. The State also needs more people from ethnic minorities in Garda uniforms.

There is evidence though that the trend is going in the wrong direction.

Since Garda recruitment resumed three years ago, the number of applicants from ethnic minority groups has been lower than 3 per cent – a steep decline on the 15 per cent figure of 2005.

Those are the numbers we need to concern ourselves with,

much more than replicating the eight-minute shoot-to-kill standard set in London.

As any passing-out parade in the Garda College, Templemore, will show, white Irish is still the predominant ethnicity in the Garda. And even among the non-white recruits, there are few black or brown faces.

The lack of Garda or Defence Forces members who speak Arabic seems like a gaping weakness in our security services. Being able to attract gardai from those countries where radicalisation is breeding most intensely would be a huge benefit, as would having an expert in spotting online radicalisation.

However, the Garda's inability to bring in such candidates is cemented by the fact the only way into the organisation is through one door – as a Templemore recruit, on the bottom rung and with a paltry starting salary.

Top personnel

The force needs to be able to head-hunt top personnel, even in small numbers, from international police forces where they have already honed the skills required. And the salaries on offer for sworn officer and civilian jobs in areas where niche expertise is needed must be exponentially increased.

A mainly white Irish police force will not penetrate ethnic minority communities easily.

It is in these communities that extremism is most likely to emerge and where it will be first noticed.

If those who spot what they believe are the first signs of extremism trust gardai, and occasionally meet some of them,

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If they know nothing about the Garda and never see them around, the passing on of information becomes less likely

they may feel comfortable enough to pass information to the force. But if they know nothing about the Garda and never see them around, the passing on of information becomes less likely.

Intelligence either flows from ethnic minority communities to the Garda or it does not. The chances are increased by

having more gardai from ethnic minorities in the force.

The Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors (Agsi) has complained that community policing has been "decimated". It has said more than one-third of all 96 Garda districts have no full-time community policing gardai assigned.

Of the 540 assigned nationally, 328 are attached to the six Dublin Metropolitan Region divisions with rural divisions having much smaller numbers, an analysis from AGSII published last year shows.

Corrupt police forces

Many members of ethnic minorities in Ireland come from countries where violence is meted out by corrupt police forces. They are immediately distrustful of a Garda uniform and badge.

When the Garda comes seeking their help to solve a crime or learn more about a suspect, seeing a face that looks somewhat like theirs looking back at them is a benefit.

The Garda Reserve has been successful in attracting many foreign nationals from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

"There were definitely times when I felt that because I didn't look Irish helped me," one reservist told *The Irish Times*

about dealing with incidents involving foreign members of the public. "Because I also wasn't Irish, sometimes people will confide in you or turn to you more than an Irish [Garda] member. It's like, 'ah, you're an outsider too'."

Numbers in the reserve have, however, fallen significantly in recent years – from 1,200 in 2013 to about 700 at present.

It is planned to increase the size of the Garda Reserve to 2,000.

The size of the full-time Garda force is also being increased, from 12,000 to 15,000. And the number of civilians is being increased to 4,000.

'New Irish'

As the force expands, more and more of those joining need to be the "new Irish". And within that group, the Garda desperately needs Arabic speakers.

In December, 2013, when Garda recruitment recommenced, 100 jobs were initially advertised.

The Garda and Department of Justice said that up to 10 per cent of the intake would be fluent Irish speakers. When the class finally entered the college late the following year, 11 were fluent Irish speakers.

None of the 100-strong class spoke Arabic.

Investigators examine killer's library records

Redouane had three library cards that could provide details on his movements

CONOR LALLY

A number of Dublin library cards taken out by London Bridge attacker Rachid Redouane are being reviewed in an attempt to uncover more information about his life in Ireland.

The Irish Times understands the 30-year-old, one of three men shot dead by police after last Saturday night's fatal van and stabbing attack, took out three library cards in 2015.

One of these, for Dolphin's Barn library in Dublin's south inner city, was a full membership and two others – Phibsborough library and the Central Library in the Ilac Centre – were provided on a temporary basis.

In February 2015, Redouane listed neither an email address nor a phone number on the temporary card registration forms but gave his home address as a flat in a house at Finglas Road, Cabra, close to Glasnevin Cemetery.

When he joined the Dolphin's Barn library in July 2015 he provided an address at Grosvenor Square in Rathmines – the address used for a marriage certificate at a Dublin registry office in November, 2012.

While it may be impossible for the Garda to establish precisely when Redouane visited the libraries, an examination of their records could yield information about his movements and interests.

Extremist material

Internet searches at the libraries on the dates he registered could be checked to determine whether, for example, any extremist material was viewed and perhaps whom he was in touch with.

Records of such activity are not retained by internet service providers but informed sources believe some records on library computers could still be retrievable.

Under Ireland's data retention laws, telephone records are kept for two years by the companies, while records of internet searches are kept for a year.

Records of WhatsApp engagements and similar services are not stored at all. Redouane, who lived in Ireland for a time and married in the State in November 2012, had at least one account with a messaging app. He also had at least one Irish mobile phone, which is still active. When the number is dialled, callers hear a one word greeting – "Rachid" – before the message

mind activates.

Sources believe Redouane and his former wife, a British woman (38) who never converted to Islam, may have moved between Dublin and London a number of times following their wedding.

The couple lived in a council flat in a tower block in Dagenham after leaving Dublin following their marriage. They are believed to have stayed there for a prolonged period before returning to Ireland for a number of months in 2015.

Council property

In the early part of 2016, by which time they had a new baby girl, the couple moved into another council property in east London.

The woman was arrested early on Sunday at another flat in Barking but it appears the couple had split up and Redouane's ex-wife and child made the move to Barking without him.



“Internet searches could be checked to determine whom he was in touch with”

Gardai are still trying to confirm Redouane's addresses while he lived in Dublin and to pinpoint the exact times he was in the country. His marriage certificate confirms his wedding took place on November 7th, 2012, and, under law, any couple intending to marry in a registry office must give at least three months' notice.

It means, if the rules were followed at the time, both Redouane and his wife would have given the Dublin registrar notice of their plans to marry at the very latest in the first week of August, 2012.

Senior Garda sources believe it was "a year or more" before the weekend attack since he had been in Dublin. However, he had access to an Irish-registered vehicle in London and he may have been able to enter Ireland in his car by ferry on a ticket purchased by somebody else.

Garda insists it is capable of swift response to terror attack

CIARÁN D'ARCY

Gardai have carried out a "paper exercise" which suggests armed police in Dublin would be able to deal with a terrorist incident within eight minutes, as happened in London on Saturday, a senior member of the force has said.

Security forces in the British capital were praised for their rapid response to the rampage by three men in the London Bridge and Borough Market areas. All three were shot dead

within eight minutes of police being notified of the attack, which left seven people dead.

Asked if he could reassure the public that gardai would be capable of a similar response, Deputy Commissioner John Twomey said he believed so.

"We did a paper exercise to see what our response capacity would have been at the same time of the incident in London, and we are happy that we would have had nine armed units in the vicinity of Dublin city centre, and we are happy that our

response would have been in a similar time with that in the UK," he said.

Garda Commissioner Nóirín O'Sullivan confirmed that Armed Support Units, unveiled last year in response to growing gangland violence, are to be expanded.

Armed Support Unit

"By June 22nd, we will have increased the capacity of the Armed Support Unit by one third. So in other words we will have an additional 20 people

going into that unit," she said at a meeting of the International Association of Chiefs of Police in Dublin.

Ms O'Sullivan said a competition was under way to further strengthen the unit nationwide, and that a series of live training exercises were planned for later this month as well as more "visible, overt armed patrols" in Dublin.

"We shouldn't be afraid of that, that's to make sure the public are safe," she said. Regarding the involvement

of Rachid Redouane, who spent time in Ireland, in the attack, Ms O'Sullivan said gardai were in touch with intelligence and law enforcement counterparts in the UK within an hour of the incident and were aware Redouane had spent time in Ireland within two hours.

'Monitored closely'

She said gardai were satisfied that there was "no link to terrorism in this country" but confirmed that people who associated with Redouane were "be-

ing monitored very closely", with one detained in Wexford.

Ms O'Sullivan also appealed to those within Muslim communities to come forward, in confidence, to gardai with information should they have concerns about anyone.

She said recruitment to the Garda must continue at pace to ensure the force's rapid response capabilities are maintained and improved.

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Isis is in retreat on social media but its propaganda is still a threat



Maura Conway
Analysis

The group's online magazines appear to show links with recent attacks

No organisation continues to commit the time, people, and money that Islamic State has put into its online media campaign over the last few years without evidence that it is getting a return on its investment.

Relatively few Isis terrorists, however, have been radicalised solely by online means. Never-

theless, in our hyper-connected world the internet is implicated in almost all contemporary terrorism, whether, for example, as a radicalisation tool or for planning attacks.

Concerns have been raised, in particular, regarding the easy access to large volumes of terrorism-promoting content on heavily trafficked social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

In the wake of the London attacks, British prime minister Theresa May issued a warning to those companies, saying that they continue to provide extremist ideology the "safe space it needs to breed".

So what's to be done? In fact, quite a lot has changed since Islamic State's social media heyday in 2014 and 2015, when its ability to produce and easily circulate high-quality, if often horrifically violent, content was at its height.

Since then, US-led forces have targeted Isis social media "experts" and strategists, such as the drone killing in August 2016 of Isis second-in-com-

mand Abu Muhammad al-Adnani and, a month later, its "minister of information" Wa'il al-Fayad.

Between September and December 2014 it was estimated that there were 46,000-90,000 pro-Isis active Twitter accounts, but we could find fewer than a thousand pro-Isis Twitter accounts with at least one follower between February and April this year.

Suspended accounts

Explicitly pro-Isis accounts, such as those using an image of a prominent Isis figure (eg the so-called caliph al-Baghdadi) for their profile picture or bearing similarities to previously suspended accounts can today be exceedingly short-lived.

Often they last for only hours. Sometimes, they last only minutes. The result has been dramatic. In 2014, the median number of followers enjoyed by pro-Isis accounts was 177. Today, it is 14, a fall of 92 per cent. Isis's previously vibrant Twitter community is now virtually nonexistent.

The routing of Isis from Twitter does not, of course, equal its disappearance from the internet. Many former Twitter account holders have relocated to the Telegram messaging app.

Established in 2013, Telegram was initially similar to WhatsApp, but the introduction of its "channels" feature in September 2015 has rendered

“Many former Twitter account holders have relocated to the Telegram messaging app”

it into a more obscure version of Twitter, but one that can operate effectively in the shadows, particularly given its encryption capacities and self-destructing secret chats function.

Official Isis Telegram channels are subject to some disruption, but generally they reappear. There are, however, numerous semi-official and Isis

"fan" channels in a range of languages on the service. So whilst Isis's reach via Telegram is less than via Twitter, the echo chamber effect may be greater as Telegram channel "owners" have much greater control over who joins their channels.

Considerable publicity Meanwhile, Islamic State's content is also available on a range of content-upload sites. Its online magazines, in particular, continue to be widely available and to receive considerable publicity in the western press.

The best known such publication produced by the group is the monthly Rumiyah or "Rome", issue seven of which was simultaneously pushed over at least 20 social media and content upload sites.

While some dispute Isis's online influence, there appears to be a link between the types of attacks advocated by the online magazines and subsequent attacks.

The recent knife and vehicle attacks, encouraged and cele-

brated by Isis magazines, may simply be copycats of other similar attacks, which points to the complex interplay of online and "real world" influences.

Some commentators believe the internet is going to have an increased role for Isis in the immediate future in the face of loss of "real world" territory.

So what more can be done? Well, Facebook and Twitter can keep doing what they have been doing to curb the promulgation of pro-Isis content. Other companies can improve on what they have been doing.

Meanwhile, calls to ban encryption will grab headlines, but threaten to break the internet if they were followed. Instead, the creators of the newest revolutionary social media apps need to be urged to ensure these do not inadvertently become Isis's next online hub.

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Warning over 'shopping for asylum status' in EU

SORCHA POLLACK

The European Union has been urged to introduce measures aimed at stopping refugees and migrants travelling from one country to another on the Continent "shopping for asylum status".

In Brussels, European Parliament president Antonio Tajani called for a common agreement from all EU member states on how they implement asylum procedures.

"At the moment the rules are not properly harmonised," said Mr Tajani. "The rules have to be the same for everybody. Otherwise we will end up with people shopping for asylum status, which undermines our credibility."

Under a revision of the Dublin Convention, which requires asylum seekers to make their application for protection in the first EU state they reach, the European Parliament is calling on nations to take extra measures to stop unregistered asylum seekers from travelling on to other EU countries.

Family reunification

The reform of the convention also calls for more avenues for family reunification and greater solidarity among member states in relocating refugees.

Swedish MEP Cecilia Wikström, rapporteur on the proposed changes, warned that secondary movement of asylum seekers to countries such as Germany, Sweden and the UK would only further cement the trend of a small number of countries shouldering the bur-

den of refugee resettlement.

A number of non-governmental organisations said many asylum seekers who relocated to eastern and central Europe were choosing to leave for western nations because of a lack of opportunities, language barriers and a desire to reunite with families.

Adrás Kováts of the Hungarian Association for Migrants said Hungary's failure to support integration services was pushing new arrivals abroad in search of opportunities.

"There's an image of Hungary as a country sealed off from

“The rules have to be the same for everybody”

asylum seekers but that is only partially true," he said, adding that small numbers of refugees and migrants had been granted asylum. Mr Kováts said most of these were ending up in homeless shelters.

Agnese Lauce from Latvia's Centre for Public Policy said low salaries, a lack of jobs and language difficulties meant asylum seekers had little incentive to remain in the country. To date, Latvia has admitted 318 asylum seekers under the EU's refugee resettlement scheme. However, according to Ms Lauce, some 313 have left the country seeking opportunities elsewhere.

"We can't force anyone to stay, that's not going to happen unless we want to close all the borders in Europe."