

The Shadow over Erris

Shell, IRMS and Bolivia



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Sometimes monsters do exist

In any country with a half way critical media the last few months would have been disastrous for Shell. In a crucial period in Shell's imposition of an experimental gas pipeline on the people of Erris it emerged that Michael Dwyer, one of the security guards on this project, was part of an attempt to trigger a civil war in Bolivia. Soon after, it became clear that at least three others who had worked as security guards at the Shell compound had travelled to Bolivia with Dwyer and are wanted for questioning. Some, it emerged, had links to fascist organisations in Eastern Europe.



Michael Dwyer posing with four pistols in Bolivia

There are at least 156 private security workers on what Shell calls the 'Corrib Project', accompanied, according to the *Irish Times*, by up to "several hundred gardai and the Naval Service .. with the Naval Service deploying one and "possibly" two patrol ships". (1) The level of force being deployed to impose the Shell pipeline project on the local population is a testimony to the long running resistance of the people of Erris - a resistance that so far has not been broken by dozens of arrests, violence and the most vitriolic of attacks from paid hacks in the mainstream media.

At the time of writing everyone is preparing for the return of the pipe laying ship, the *Soltaire*. In advance of its return, strange events have occurred in the dead of night. One Shell to Sea protester, Willie Corduff, required hospitalisation after an encounter with masked men at the Shell compound at 4am. The fishing boat of another key Shell to Sea activist, Pat O'Donnell, was boarded at 2am by four masked and armed men who proceed to sink the boat, leaving the two men on board to fend for themselves. What is striking is the almost complete failure of the Irish media to investigate any of these stories in a serious way, or to explore the elements that link events in Bolivia and Erris.

Lack of investigation

Yet in the same period we have seen both TV and print 'investigations' of the situation in Erris where the pipeline is being imposed. Bizarrely, these have targeted the under-resourced locals and their supporters as some sort of 'dark force' in the whole struggle and treated Shell as if its some sort of squeaky clean neutral force whose every utterance (including the 'off the record' ones) can be treated as statements of fact. And just as extraordinarily these 'journalists' have chosen to leave out the fact that known corrupt politicians changed the rules to allow Shell access to the gas on a royalty free basis.

At a time when health, education and community programs are being slashed due to 'lack of funds' surely this is a story? Given the history of corruption that has emerged from the tribunals, which involved the same politicians who gave Shell the Gas for free, what might be uncovered with a little journalism?

The material found with a little bit of googling on the topic would make for a Hollywood film script, never mind a major expose in any of the major papers. Yet a comprehensive article has yet to appear in any major Irish mainstream media outlet. As we will see more has appeared in the international press. On the margins of the Irish media some things have been published, but these have basically been the work of just one or two of the dozens of journalists who are supposedly reporting on the David v Goliath confrontation happening in Erris. Even in these cases, too often the names of the companies and sites these men worked for and on have been omitted.

Of course we will never know for sure what the facts behind many of these events are, nor the connections between them. After all, decisions to start civil wars or to sink boats are not going to be made and recorded in board rooms. Shell has a long, long history of imposing projects on local populations and 'dealing' with the consequences of resistance. While we cannot say for sure what happened, we can bring the facts as they are known together and paint a picture that will allow the reader to draw

their own conclusions. The picture is strange and complex, and understanding it requires a little patience. But the patience will be rewarded as distinct patterns emerge from what at first seems a bizarre patchwork of colours and shapes sprayed upon a wall by a careless creator.

Dogs of war

In April 2009 Bolivian special forces raided a hotel room in Santa Cruz. During the course of the raid they shot dead an Irishman, Michael Dwyer, who had worked at the Shell compound in Erris. Also killed were Eduardo Rozsa Flores, who was a Croatian-Bolivian fascist, and one other man. Two others were arrested. In the following days the Bolivian authorities claimed that the gang around Flores were working to spark a civil war leading to the secession of the gas rich Santa Cruz region. Testimony was given that they had carried out one bombing and were planning a wave of assassinations. Not only had weapons been found in the hotel room, but so too were pictures of the men posing with a high powered sniper rifle capable of hitting a target at 1km.

The killing of Michael Dwyer in Bolivia was treated by the Irish media as an oddity that had no particular connection to anything happening in Ireland. But how did Michael Dwyer - who had worked as security at the Shell pipeline building project in Erris, Co Mayo - end up being shot dead in Bolivia? Within days of the killing it emerged that many of the others wanted for questioning were European fascists, recruited by Flores.

There was another connection, although it was more normally hinted at than spelled out. Shell used to have a gas pipeline in Bolivia until less than a year before Dwyer met his death. President Morales had announced the nationalisation of this pipeline at the start of June 2008 after claiming that the holding company, which Shell had a 25% stake in, had “conspired against his government.” This was four months before Dwyer left the Shell compound in Glengad, with a number of his fellow security guards, for Bolivia. (2)



The *Phoenix Magazine* was one media outlet that has dared to put some of the connections into print, and the fact that this magazine is read by just about every journalist in Ireland means that the rest of the media can't plead ignorance of the facts. In an article entitled 'Dwyer, IRMS and the Szekler Legion' the *Phoenix* reports that Dwyer “fell in with a group of right wing Hungarians led by one Tibor Revesz, commander of the so called Szekler Legion, a paramilitary movement” some of whose members had worked as security at Shell's Erris compound. (3) The *Phoenix* was being cautious, in an *Irish Examiner* article Scott Miller described the Szekler Legion as “an openly fascist paramilitary group which trains with AK-47s.” (4)

Big-mouthed fascists



Dwyer it turned out had a fascist tattoo and was known to Irish fascists. On the Irish section of the fascist organising website Stormfront, a regular poster called 'Byzantium Endures' reposted an article about Dwyer's death on the day it was reported with the note 'RIP mike'. The same person returned a day later to post “He had SS sig runes tattooed on his arm, I know he was a WN.” (WN stands for 'white nationalist', i.e. fascist). 'Byzantium Endures' was to go on to make some pretty stunning claims, included in them were facts that were not yet in widespread circulation.

On the following day 'Byzantium Endures' posted again, to claim that “Mike was in Bolivia working for a private security company, Integrated Risk Management Services (IRMS). It is owned by Terry Downes and James Farrell. Both Downes and Farrell are former members of the Irish Army Rangers.” And later that day “Just to add Mike's work out there involved doing close quarter protection work for

Shell executives, seems Morales is sending a message to those who oppose him.” (5)

Fascists - particularly of the online variety - are notorious fantasists, so these claims need to be taken with a very large pinch of salt. 'Byzantium Endures' identifies Dwyer as connected with IRMS at around the same point as this was first being raised on indymedia.ie, and also identifies the tattoo on his arm as being fascist in character. 'Byzantium Endures' obviously believed Dwyer was still working for IRMS, however on April 22nd "I-RMS confirmed in a statement to *The Irish Times* that Mr Dwyer had worked for the company. It said he was employed as a security guard at the Corrib gas construction site from March to mid-October." (6) Presumably this difference in accounts ('Byzantium Endures' version is similar to what it is reported Dwyer had told his parents) was because Dwyer could hardly tell the folks back home what he was actually up to.

Disappearing websites

A second *Phoenix* article by 'Goldhawk' went on to point out that, "coincidentally no sooner had *The Irish Times* referred to Dwyer's work for IRMS than the security company's website was taken offline to be "updated" and the references to "special services" and "international armed and unarmed security" were removed before access to the site was again prohibited. Goldhawk was anxious to get details of this "international armed and unarmed" activity from IRMS but the company failed to return his call." (7)

Integrated Risk Management Services (I-RMS) specialises in the development and delivery of customised security solutions at home and worldwide. Our Standard Security Services include guarding assets, cash in transit, patrols and escorts whilst our high level Corporate services include business risk consultancy, logistics security and surveillance. Event Services include security at corporate events, festivals, concerts and sporting events. We also offer Special Services to our clients such as corporate and private security consultancy, close protection, maritime security and international armed and unarmed security. Our clients include some of the biggest names in the corporate sector both at a national and international level, governments, public bodies and high-profile individuals. We believe in global best practice being delivered locally.



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The sequence of changes to the IRSM site that occurred after news of Dwyer's death in Bolivia. First the references to "special services" and "international armed and unarmed security" were removed and then the site was taken off line.

The IRMS website was not the only one that went down after the shootings. Another site to go down was photosniper.freedom.hu which was the personal site of Tibor Revesz, the ex-Hungarian army soldier identified in the first *Phoenix* article as the “commander of the so called Szekler Legion.” Revesz had left Bolivia ahead of the special forces raid that killed Dwyer and since then as *Phoenix* points out “websites appear to have been falling like ninepins, not least that of IRMS itself.” (8) The material on Ravesz site relating to Shell and Erris was also removed but not before some of it was spotted and copied by bloggers interested in the story.

Bloggers reported on indymedia.ie (9) and politics.ie that Revesz had, on his website, souvenir badges, t-shirts and hoodies “commemorating two of the ‘glorious battles’ against the anti-Shell campaigners.” The implication of this is that he thought he had some sort of market to sell these to, presumably other Szekler legion members who had also worked in Erris. Just how many of these were there, apart from the ones we already know of?



Two of the badges that Revez had on his website prior to it being taken offline. Note the similarity with the SS Deaths head skull on right.

They also revealed that the Revesz / photosniper site had been used in October 2008 to appeal for volunteers for an expedition to Bolivia (just 3 months after the nationalisation of the Shell pipeline there). October 2008 was also when IRMS claims Dwyer left their employment. On his CV on his web site, Revez said he started working for IRMS on 25.03.2008 but has no end date listed, as he had for all his previous employers. (10)

Scott Miller, writing in the *Irish Examiner*, got a little more information out of IRMS on June 20, writing "talking to the *Irish Examiner* in the Broadhaven Hotel, Mr Farrell confirmed that two Eastern European men who travelled to Bolivia with Mr Dwyer have in recent weeks resigned from his company. He dismisses speculation of any possible involvement by his company in the South American venture." (11)

This backs up an earlier *Irish Times* report from June 2nd that some of those who travelled to Bolivia with Dwyer were still working for IRMS on their return. In that piece, Conor Lally could not find it within himself to even name the security firm the men had worked for, never mind mention the name of Shell. He reported that “police in Bolivia want to interview three men living in Ireland about their movements in Bolivia with Michael Dwyer, .. The three men .. worked with Mr Dwyer in Ireland. The men – two Hungarians and a Slovak – travelled to Bolivia with Mr Dwyer last November. One of the men is still working in the same security company in Ireland where he and Mr Dwyer met. The other two men worked for the same firm until recently and are still living in Ireland.” (12)

Scott Miller had earlier reported in an *Irish Examiner* article that “Gábor Dudog and Gáspár Dániel, associated with the Szekler Legion are currently missing in Bolivia. According to reports in the Hungarian press, Mr Dudog worked in Ireland in the security business and spent six to eight months in Bolivia, protecting deliveries for a major oil company.” In light of what we now know one wonders just which ‘major oil company’ Dudog was working for. One also wonders why the *Irish Examiner*,

which has been braver in its coverage than most Irish papers, felt unable to name that company or to say exactly where in the security business in Ireland Dudog had worked.

It would be interesting to hear more from IRMS as to who these three men are and the specific dates on which they left IRMS employment.

Naming names

The curious thing about almost all the media coverage is the obvious evasion in the way the sections of the articles that mention, or might mention, companies and names are written. Yet this *Irish Times* piece is still significant in saying that those who traveled with Dwyer were still working for the unnamed 'security company' and that at the point in time (June 2nd) this article was written, one of them still was! It would be interesting to know exactly where they were working, but then if Conor didn't want to name the company he would hardly want to reveal that information either. Conor Lally is one of a number of journalists who has written about the Erris struggle in a manner calculated to portray the protesters in a negative light - it is a pity he is so much more cautious when writing about the other side of that struggle.

The international press has not shared this caution. Here for instance is *Saigon Daily's* version of events, which is in turn a reprint of the *Wall Street Journal's* coverage. The first line introduces some new characters in the story, their relevance will be explained shortly.

"The Morales government says Mr. Marinkovic aided the Rósza gang with money and houses.

...

In Ireland, Mr. Révész worked as a guard at a pipeline project, according to one friend and one co-worker. It was the same place where Michael Dwyer, the young Irishman, worked. Integrated Risk Management Services Ltd., contractor for security at the pipeline, said Mr. Dwyer was a security guard for six months last year. The company didn't respond to an email asking about Mr. Révész's employment." (13)

Marinkovic was a major shareholder in the Shell pipeline, which was nationalised by the Bolivian government. The Bolivian government accuses him of being linked with Rosza, the apparent commander of the gang. Marinkovic denies this connection. Dwyer was of course killed with Rosza in the Santa Cruz hotel. From the investigations in Bolivia it appears the return flights of 11 people including Dwyer were paid for from Madrid to Bolivia. *La Prensa* of June 4 named the eight who actually travelled as "The Irishman Michael Dwyer, the Hungarians Tibor Revesz, Elod Toaso, Daniel Gaspar and Gabor Dudog, the Slovak Ivan Pistovcak, the Romanian Arpad Magyarosi and the Bolivian-Croatian Mario Tadic." (14) Of these 8 men Dwyer and Arpad (a Szekler Legion member) were killed in the hotel room raid in Bolivia. Toaso (also named by the *Examiner* as a Szekler legion member) was arrested in the same raid. Some of the others named, including Revesz have been named in Bolivia as being wanted for questioning in connection with the events there.

The Sunday Mail speaks out

In terms of papers published in Ireland the one that perhaps has gone the furthest at this point in time is *The Mail*. This is a little surprising as politically it is further to the right than any of the domestic titles that have stayed quiet, but then its owner isn't linked into oil and gas exploration off the west coast of Ireland. On May 31st *The Mail* reported

"It is now known that Kildare-based security firm Integrated Risk Management Services (I-RMS) played a part in bringing Dwyer together with right-wing Hungarian elements from a group known as the Szekler Legion - an outfit prepared to use violence to achieve autonomy for ethnic Hungarians in a border region of Romania.

One of those elements was Tibor Revesz, a commander of the Szekler Legion and the owner of its websites - upon which appeals for volunteers for an insurgency campaign in Santa Cruz were advertised late last year.



Both Revesz - who is being sought by Bolivian law enforcement and thought to be still in Ireland - and Dwyer worked for I-MRS protecting the Shell Corrib gas project. It is here, facing down protests from the Shell to Sea campaign, that the pair are thought to have met.

.. Revesz also used his website to advertise an I-RMS close-protection course that included pistol, carbine and tactical firearms training. All of Revesz's web pages have been deleted in recent weeks.

I-RMS - based beside the Army Ranger Wing HQ in the Curragh in Co. Kildare - has refused to comment about its role in bringing Dwyer and right-wing fanatics together.

But there is no doubt that any of the foreign-owned oil companies present in Bolivia would certainly have an easier life if something were to happen to Morales." (15)

The Rangers and Fort Benning

The Mail article introduces a new element, the role of the Irish Rangers, into the story. Who are the Army Rangers? They are an elite and secretive 'special forces' unit of the Irish army intended to fill a similar function to the SAS or elite US military formations. A good first source is the Irish Army website (16) which, despite blurring the faces of Rangers in photos, otherwise tells us quite a bit. For instance under their history of the unit they tell us that "in the late 1960s and early 1970s a small number of [Irish] Defence Forces personnel attended American Army Ranger Courses at Fort Benning, Georgia in the United States. On their return, these personnel were responsible for organising similar type courses."

Fort Benning, Georgia is the home of the 'School of the Americas' (SoA) often referred to as the 'School of the Assassins' because "many of its students have been associated with death squads, and coups in Latin American countries" (17) including Roberto D'Aubuisson who murdered the Salvadorean Archbishop Óscar Romero while he celebrated mass. In November 1989 SoA graduates murdered six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter. The SoA trains the special forces units of many of the armies in Central and South America, the equivalent of the Irish Rangers.

School of the Americas Watch says the school "taught repressive techniques and promoted the violation of human rights throughout Latin America and around the globe. The manuals contain instructions in motivation by fear, bounties for enemy dead, false imprisonment, torture, execution, and kidnapping a target's family members." Every year more than 10,000 people demonstrate at the School of the Americas on the anniversary of the killing of the 6 priests, their housekeeper and her daughter. As a result of US state repression against these protests "183 people have collectively served over 81 years in prison."

The Irish Army website actually situates the formation of the Rangers in the context of the sort of training the SoA provides (with, of course, a positive spin), when it writes "the evolution of the Army Ranger Wing resulted from an increase in international terrorism in the late 1970s and 1980s .. European and other countries realised that conventional police and military tactics were not suited to dealing with this escalating threat." Elsewhere their site refers to "seaborne interventions" and "difficult or dangerous specialist tasks on land or at sea", under the heading 'Aid to the Civil Power'. It would be interesting to know what, if any, Ranger deployments may have happened on the land and sea around Erris under the excuse of 'Aid to the Civil Power'.

The Strange events in Erris and motivation by fear

Now that we know a bit about Ranger training and their possible scope of operations, it is worth looking again at some of the stranger events that have been reported from Erris. What at first seems fantastical seems less so when you take into account who may be deployed down there and just how far the Rozsa group were willing to go in Bolivia. Really in that context the happenings at Erris are not at all extreme, quite the opposite in fact. The odd beating or sinking hardly measures up to the bombing of cardinals or assassination of state governors.

Following the mysterious attack by masked men on local activist Willie Corduff at the Shell compound, the *Mayo News* carried the following:

In an emotional interview, Mr Corduff recalled how, after spending almost 19 hours lodged under a Shell lorry, he was allegedly assaulted by men in balaclavas .. "I think they were professionals. They seemed to be big men. They put me down on the ground and all I can remember is four of them kneeling on me. They didn't use their hands, they used their knees. They squeezed me like a sandwich and they had my airwaves closed off; and my hands were at the back of my head." (18)

Then on the night of 11th June local fisherman and activist Pat O'Donnell's boat the 'Iona Isle' was boarded by four masked and armed men and sunk out at sea. A Shell to Sea press release reported the event as follows:

At 2am on Thursday morning, Pat O'Donnell's boat the 'Iona Isle' was boarded by four masked men and sunk out at sea, near where Mr. O'Donnell lays his fishing pots off Erris, North Mayo. Mr. O'Donnell and crewman Martin McDonnell were attacked and held down by some of the men, while others went below deck, where they proceeded to sink the boat. Both local men have been taken to Castlebar General Hospital, where they are recovering. (19)

Pat later put out an account on indymedia.ie, which included the following information:

Pat O'Donnell's fishing boat was boarded by four masked men, two of whom were armed, at approximately two o'clock this morning whilst out at sea laying pots. The two armed men held Mr O'Donnell and his crewman Martin McDonnell in the wheelhouse of the boat while another two went below deck for 20 minutes. These men returned to the deck and the two crew members were held for one and a half hours until the engine went out. At this point the masked men alighted onto an unknown vessel that took them away. None of the men spoke good English. Mr O'Donnell went down to the engine room and realised that the boat was sinking." (20)

One aspect of the special forces training described by SoA Watch falls under the heading 'motivation by fear'. This would seem a reasonable term to describe some of the events in the Erris area. Many locals are on record as being afraid of the various mysterious forces active in and around the area. Among other things, they have been unable to get clear answers about who has been seen filming them (and their children). The limited media coverage of their fears has tended to ridicule them as being unreasonable, yet when you look at the big picture, it becomes clear their fears are very reasonable indeed.

What was going on in Bolivia?

Dwyer's mission appears to have been to help spark a civil war that would lead to the secession of the Santa Cruz region from the rest of Bolivia. Much of the mineral wealth, including the gas of Bolivia, is in the Santa Cruz region. Bolivia is currently ruled by Evo Morales, a radical president who was swept to power on the back of a massive social movement and who then part-nationalised the gas industry - including Shell's pipeline. It is possible the secession of Santa Cruz would see the rise of politicians more compliant with the interests of international energy corporations like Shell. In other words, more like the sort of politicians that gave Shell the gas royalty free in Ireland.

Branco Marinkowitz is the politician and large business owner who has been identified in the Bolivian and international press as the main leader of the secessionist movement. Marinkowitz is a founder (and president) of the secessionist Council of Santa Cruz. Shell's connection with Marinkowitz is through a pipeline company that Shell also owned 25% of until it was nationalised - four months before Dwyer and the others left the Shell compound in Glengad, Erris.

The Irish mainstream media have almost universally tried to paint Dwyer as an innocent abroad, at worst a Walter Mitty type character caught up in a situation he didn't understand. Minister Micheal Martin initially played the same game before going quiet once more details started to emerge from Bolivia. We'll look at Dwyer's involvement in detail in a while, but let there be no doubt that those he was working with were dangerous people.

Eduardo Rozsa Flores

The military organiser of the Bolivian expedition was Eduardo Rozsa Flores, killed with Dwyer. He left a pre-recorded interview broadcast after his death on Hungarian TV where he said:

"I have been called to organise the defense of the city and province of Santa Cruz, the Council of Santa Cruz have voted for the creation of a regional security council. I will go to Brazil and Bolivia and begin to organise Militia. The organisers will provide funding and arms .. illegally and probably from Brazil .. I understand there will be a conflict with the Central Government .. We won't walk with flags, we will do it with arms, we will declare independence and create a new country."



A picture taken by the gang of Rosza sleeping with his guns

The Belgrade daily, *Politika*, wrote the following about Eduardo Rozsa Flores in the 1991 Croatian war "... he joined the infamous Croat paramilitary unit Zenga and became the commander of the 'International Brigade'. Reporters Without Borders accused him of killing two foreign correspondents in Croatia, Swiss Christian Wurtemberg and British photographer Paul Jenks." (21)

After the deaths in Bolivia one British journalist in Croatia at the time of these killing published a long description of the events in the right wing *Daily Telegraph* newspaper (hardly one with sympathies for Morales):

"I spent most of my time that day with a Swiss man called Christian Wurtemberg .. His was an intelligent and articulate voice amid the mayhem. So a chill went down my spine when I heard a few days later that he had been killed.

More chilling was the subsequent news that he had been dispatched by strangling - an unusual end in a conflict that claimed tens of thousands of lives. Various witnesses have since come forward to say that he was tortured and garroted on Flores' orders as a suspected spy, although the commander claimed he was killed in an ambush.

Two weeks later, Paul Jenks, a freelance British photographer, was shot dead in the same fields that I had stared out at during my visit to Flores' headquarters. A single sniper's bullet to the back of his neck felled him. .. The back of his head was exposed to the closer positions of Flores' forces. And Jenks had reportedly been investigating Wurtemberg's death when he met his own." (22)

Dwyer's involvement

Clearly, based on his own statements and past actions, Eduardo Flores was a ruthless and dangerous character. And in the hearings that have been happening in Bolivia the evidence presented does not paint Dwyer as an outsider but rather as Rosza's right hand man and possibly his bodyguard.

"According to Bolivian media reports, Mr Gueder Bruno said he attended meetings along with Mr Dwyer during which the killing of local politicians was discussed. .. This evidence was backed up by a video showing Mr Dwyer at a meeting in which the possible assassination of Bolivia's Socialist president, Evo Morales, was discussed by Mr Flores." (23)

Bolivian TV showed pictures of Dwyer and others posing with a variety of weapons including a high-powered sniper rifle accurate to over a kilometer. (24)

Other reports of the testimony reveal that:

"Gueder Bruno, a member of the far-right Santa Cruz Youth Council (UJC) and charged with terrorist crimes, admitted on Thursday that he supplied arms to the group led by the Bolivian-Croat, Eduardo Rozsa, organizer of a cell of international mercenaries who were planning an assassination in Bolivia. .. "I withdrew from the project of locating weapons when Rozsa said, in the second meeting, that he wanted to target the Governor of Santa Cruz" .. Gueder Bruno said that the Paraguayan Mendoza Malavi, and also Magyarosi Arpad, Michael Dwyer and Eduardo Rozsa Flores were at both meetings." (25)

Perhaps most damning off all was the *La Prensa* report that:

The statement of the arrested Mario Tadic .. said the people who carried out the attack on the house of Cardinal Terrazas July were Eduardo Rózsa Flores and Michael Martin Dwyer. In one paragraph he stated that 'The day the thing exploded at the home of the Cardinal, Eduardo and



Toaso pictured with the sniper rifle that can hit targets at a range of 1km

Mike arrived at about one o'clock in the morning and boasted of what was done: 'We threw that one at him and now we'll see what will happen'. Mike's face was frightening in his joy". (26)

The day before Dwyer was shot, the home of the Cardinal of Santa Cruz had been attacked with dynamite. The Cardinal was actually a supporter of the secessionists, the purpose of the attack appears to have been to stir up their own supporters.

Why the fascist involvement?

This is a complex story. One that stretches from the isolation of western Ireland to Bolivia, from the elite wing of the Irish Army to shadowy eastern European fascist organisations and far right mercenary plots. It reads like a bad B-movie plot. But the bodies in the Santa Cruz hotel room are real enough, as are the sinister and strange events in Erris around the Shell compound there.

There are two common aspects to these geographically separate stories. In both a Shell pipeline plays a significant role. In both some of the foot soldiers are recruited from fascist organisations to fight, and in the Bolivian case die, for interests they perhaps did not fully understand. But what would a bunch of European fascists be doing getting involved in a Bolivian coup?

An article published on indymedia.ie by Fionuala Cregan shortly after Dwyer's death explains this in detail. She wrote that the secessionist groups include:

The Unión Juvenil Cruceña (Union of Cruzeno Youth): a youth group with open neo-Nazism sentiments and which has been involved in frequent violent mob attacks against the local indigenous population, and Nacion Camba, an openly racist organization formed of local "intellectuals". The Nacion Camba web site is quoted to illustrate this as follows "In general Bolivia is perceived to be a fundamentally Andean country made up of aymara and quechua – a backward and miserable ethnicity .. whose bureaucratic centre in La Paz exploits our economic wealth, condemning us to backwardness .. but there is another side to Bolivia, the 30% of the population who are based in the east and who are made up Mestizos (mixed race European and indigenous)."

It is a common fantasy among many fascists, that of carrying out acts of provocation which will spark off a 'race war'. It appears that circumstances in Bolivia probably gave Flores a recruiting argument that went beyond financial reward. Certainly, Dwyer's friend on Stormfront had been exposed to these arguments when he wrote: "Whites in Bolivia are under seige from the commie govt, no different then in South Africa, thankfully they are getting organised and trying to create their own homeland. Most Whites in Bolivia are v racially aware. Mike was just unlucky murdered by a commie despot to justify further anti White oppression."

These fascists are simply useful idiots in the global corporate game of gaining control over energy resources. They are something of a distraction from the real story here, except as an illustration of just how careless IRMS were in terms of recruitment for the Corrib site. A carelessness that may not have ended with the deaths in Santa Cruz, for the *News of the World* of June 6th carried an article on a secret fascist meeting in Dublin where they reported that "another attendee, Thor, claimed he worked in security on the Corrib project in Co. Mayo, where he regularly "bust heads". He also claimed he had contacted members of the far-right linked to the recent failed assassination plot, which ended in the death of Irishman Michael Dwyer." (27) He posts as thor1488 on Stormfront where he taunted other fascists in one post that "you advocate the political route, the legal, above board, public face of the wn cause, while i am a member of the underground who is willing to use direct action against the antifa, swp and the rest of the unwashed." (28)

None of the events in Bolivia directly involve Shell. The corporation is always at least one step, if not more, removed from events on the ground. Outside of Stormfront (hardly the most reliable of sources) none of the Bolivian plotters have been named as directly working for the corporation at that point in time. That said we don't know who the "major oil company" that Dudog worked for in Bolivia, and to who Scott Miller referred to in the *Irish Examiner*, is.

Shell, Nigeria and the New York settlement

Shell have just settled out of court in New York to avoid a trial for complicity in the decision to hang Ken Saro-Wiwa, Dr. Barinem Kiobel, John Kpuien, Baribo Bera, Saturday Dobe, Felix Nwate, Nordu Eawo, Paul Levura and Daniel Gboko in Nigeria. (29) The settlement means the evidence will not now be heard, but in advance of the trial *Reuters* reported that “lawyers for the plaintiffs say evidence in the trial will include documents in which Shell called Saro-Wiwa a threat that should be eliminated.” According to a *Bloomberg* report, “the plaintiffs claim Shell’s Nigerian unit assisted the government in the abuse and murder of opponents of the company’s operations in the Niger Delta. .. Shell recruited Nigerian police and military to attack villages and suppress the movement.” (30)

Rather unsurprisingly, in advance of the trial Shell spokeswoman Robin Lebovitz said the allegations are “without merit.” After the 15.5 million dollar settlement by Shell, *The Guardian* wrote that:

What it suggests is that Shell wants to bury the facts about what was happening on the Niger delta in the 1970s and 1980s .. The settlement stops the world knowing exactly what was the company’s relationship with the national government and the military, and the extent of Shell’s involvement in the human rights abuses that led to Ken Saro-Wiwa’s execution.” (31)

Shell’s PR buys results

Shell spends huge amount of money on PR, in 1998 “Shell spent US\$30 million on contracts with PR company Fishburn & Hedges alone.”(32) The article “*Irish Times* Shell PR” in the May 22 issue of the *Phoenix* looks at how in Ireland Shell have successfully changed the line of the *Irish Times* over the last two years to the point where now the *Irish Times* now frequently send their crime correspondent to cover protests in Erris. *The Irish Times* is not unique in this respect, media outlet after media outlet considers it suitable to send crime correspondents to cover the protests despite not only the bias this reveals, but also the fact that crime correspondents depend on developing and maintaining positive relations with the Gardai to continue to get news stories. If they want to continue to get the scoops their jobs depend on they are not in a position to bite the hands that feed them such stories.

Such is the success of Shell’s PR machine that when Colm Rapple, a guest on RTE’s ‘Marian Finucane’ show managed to slip in a mention of the Bolivian story, Cathal McCarthy howled in anguish in *The Independent* going so far as to threaten that

It might be unwise of RTE to allow anyone to suggest outlandish and ruinous speculative motives to what was, at the very least, the violent killing of an Irish citizen in the most dubious circumstances of which it is possible to conceive. (33)

The Independent is controlled by the O’Reilly’s, pre-crash billionaires who co-incidentally hold a “40% stake in Providence Resources Plc, the Irish based oil and gas exploration and development company.” (34) The Independent News & Media group group also owns the *Evening Herald*, *Irish Independent*, *Sunday Independent*, *Sunday World* and the *Irish Daily Star*, as well as 14 regional titles and two free newspapers, plus a 98% stake in the *Sunday Tribune*. The observant reader will perhaps notice that none of these titles have named names on the Shell / IRMS / Bolivia story, although most, if not all, of these titles have been happy enough to throw all manner of weird and wonderful accusations at the locals and their supporters who oppose the Shell pipeline .

You can see why journalists in this country are not prepared to commit hari kari on their career by naming names in this story. Even if you are not a journalist currently working for an Independent title you would want to be careful of pissing off the family who own a 40% state in an Irish oil and gas exploration company, as you may well be looking for a job at one of those titles in the future. And it’s not like what is left of the Irish media has been a whole lot better, with the honorable exceptions of *The Phoenix* and the *Irish Examiner*, both of which are sadly rather small circulation niche titles.

Another consequence of Shell’s highly successful PR offensive is the routine appearance of articles in the media that seek to portray the locals and their supporters as subversives. Sometimes this can be quite farcical, for example the *Phoenix* points to the *Irish Times*’ Peter Murtagh getting away with publishing an article in March where he links the struggle to “‘notorious INLA murderer’ Dominic

McGlinchy” on the weird grounds that “his son supports the protests.” While there have been acres of coverage in the media on that sort of basis, the facts revealed in the aftermath of the killing of Dwyer have received scant coverage.

Semi-state bodies

A large part of this story revolves around Integrated Risk Management Services (IRMS). The company that at least four or five of the men who travelled to Bolivia had worked for and for whom two or three continued to work for on their return, at least for a while. *The Phoenix* has been looking at IRMS over a number of issues and has concluded that “clearly the company has good connections in establishment circles, security and political.” (35) The meaning of political is clear enough, indeed IRMS have provided security for several of the Fianna Fail Ard Fheiseanna. But what about ‘security’?



IRSM director and ex-Irish Ranger Jim Farrell at a protest in Erris

We know IRMS were founded by a pair of retired Irish Rangers and that their offices are located near the HQ of the Rangers. The location alone suggests some sort of ongoing connection, perhaps of an informal kind. After all, men who served together in elite units often form bonds that go beyond the period of service. Yet the Rangers traditionally strongly discourage not only any sort of ‘nixer’ (work on the side), but also any involvement in politics - two barriers involvement in IRMS would obviously cross. Of course, retired Rangers are no longer bound by these restrictions, indeed many go into one form or another of ‘security’ work, not just in Ireland but around the globe.

Their training provides them with a skill set that is useful for many corporate requirements. Is it also useful for the Irish state to maintain an informal ongoing relationship, both through individual politicians and serving members of the security forces? In Erris it would make no sense if there were not ongoing and constant contacts between IRMS and the Gardai and Navy commanders on the scene.

Is this part of the growing pattern in Western militaries, where certain tasks are ‘out sourced’ to private companies who don’t operate under the same constraints as the state security forces proper do? The most infamous of these is Blackwater, which deployed 20,000 to 30,000 armed security contractors to Iraq during the ongoing occupation there. Many of its employees were drawn from a database of 21,000 former Special Forces operatives, soldiers, and retired law enforcement agents. If the US state found it useful to have a militarily trained private security company on hand, could the same not be true of the Irish state? On the protests at Erris there is little to distinguish between the Gardai and the IRMS security except that IRMS mostly stay inside the compound. The exception being the Shell ‘security’ boats which are crewed by Gardai and presumably IRMS personnel with training in “difficult or dangerous specialist tasks on land or at sea.”

Apart from the boat crews, the IRMS role at the Shell compound clearly goes beyond that of static security, at the very least it also includes intelligence gathering. On a walk around the compound one

evening in early June three friends and I were filmed by at least five different private security workers inside the Shell compound - larger numbers have been observed filming protests at the compound. Somewhat chillingly, after the death of Dwyer in Bolivia, photos were discovered that appear to show Dwyer and Revez caught in the act of videoing protesters at the Shell compound. It is hard to be 100% sure of this identification because, as is often the case with security there, the headgear and sunglasses of the man who may be Dwyer obscures his identity. Are IRMS providing a role beyond the dozens of sometimes-masked security that line the fences of the Shell compound?



A picture taken at a protest in Erris that appears to show Dwyer and Revez filming protesters. The inset images are pictures of the two men for comparison with those pictured

The government's Private Security Authority chief executive Geraldine Larkin reaction to what has appeared in the media and to complaints made in Erris about IRMS was reported by the *Irish Times* as being that the (unnamed) "security firm working for Shell on the Corrib gas project is the "most monitored" security company in the State." (36) It is not clear what this monitoring means in real terms in relation to Erris. For example, Michael Dwyer did not even have the appropriate Private Security Authority (PSA) license for his static security work for Shell in Mayo. *The Phoenix* revealed that some of the other IRMS personnel named in recent Erris court cases do not appear to be listed in the PSA database. (37) In a court report on May 1st, the *Mayo Advertiser* wrote that:

Judge Devins said in light of recent media reports about the connection between IRMS staff and issues in Bolivia the superintendent would go back to the DPP about the credibility of the two IRMS witnesses as the DPP may direct that it was now time for their employers to come into court." (38)

The government appointed DPP subsequently "ruled that any involvement of the security company "outside the jurisdiction" should not be examined".

The Phoenix report concludes with some questions they would like IRMS to answer, reproduced below:

"Why has the IRMS website remained offline since shortly after the death in Bolivia of the firm's former employee Michael Dwyer? When did the firm cease to employ the Hungarian Tibor Revesz, whose web address was used to recruit for the Bolivian escapade and featured a notice concerning an IRMS course involving arms training? And what precisely is meant by services formerly advertised on IRMS's own website described as "international armed and unarmed security"." (39)

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A segment of the IRMS website before it was taken offline

We also know that the armed Gardai Emergency Response Unit (ERU) has been deployed in Erris on at least one occasion, and it is rumored that the operation down there is now being run by a Guard who previously headed up the ERU. This is a very curious choice for the policing of protest - the armed ERU was designed for shoot outs with armed criminals and paramilitaries, not policing protests of farmers and fishermen. The Gardai have been operating as if they were at war, among an occupied population.

They have shown little interest in investigating any of the strange occurrences in the area. The Mayo News of 22 June quoted a letter from local campaign group to the Minister of Justice which read:

Law and order is being subverted in our community by a sinister, unknown group that is targeting well-known opponents of the Corrib gas project .. Senior officers continue to publicly belittle us when we report incidents and to dismiss the gravity of these events. (40)

The Phoenix points out that the Gardai's reaction to the sinking of Pat O'Donnell's boat was very odd. The Gardai press release, circulated after Pat had said the assailants' boat had escaped to the north, insisted - for a reason no one understands - that it would have had to escape to the south-east. And their first action was to demand Pat's clothes as if he was their suspect rather than the victim of the crime.

This follows on from Gardai actions last summer when they repeatedly arrested Pat under the pretext of Public Order Act simply in order to get his boat out of Broadhaven Bay to make room for Shell's pipe-laying ship *The Solitaire*. As the *Mayo News* explained, "on one occasion he was released from Belmullet Garda Station two minutes before his lawyers in Dublin were due to present papers to the High Court for an inquiry into his arrest under Article 42.4.2 of the Constitution." (41) Because he had been released the High Court refused to proceed with the inquiry! His arrest, and the perfect timing of his release, was just one example of how the Gardai in Erris have been making up the law as they go along in order to fulfill Shell's needs, safe in the knowledge that those further up the chain have their backs covered.

Reviewing YouTube video's of various protests at Erris shows an often shocking level of Gardai violence towards the local population, some of them quite elderly or very young. Unsurprisingly almost none of the hundreds of complaints about Gardai violence have been upheld. These days, few in Erris bother lodging complaints anymore.

The Great Gas Giveaway

Something I have observed in my involvement in the campaign is how people, upon getting involved and making their first 'fact finding' trip to the area, return full of suggestions about how the campaign needs to get the media to cover the story. The reasonable assumption they make is that the campaign has been failing to issue press releases etc - such is the yawning gap between what they have read in the newspapers and seen on TV, and the reality on the ground.

Why is the media, even outside of the Independent group titles so silent? Perhaps it is fear of a libel action backed by the deep pockets of Shell? Or simply that many of these journalists have been wined and dined by Shell. For instance according to the *Phoenix*, Paul Williams - whose 'documentary' on the project was a single minded attack on the protesters - was the guest of Shell at the 2007 England Rugby match at Croke Park, part of what Shell told the *Phoenix* was their "stakeholder engagement list." And of course, the state media is controlled by the same state that is deploying hundreds of Gardai, along with the Irish Navy, to force the corporate project through against the resistance of Irish citizens.

The media silence extends beyond the Bolivian story to the Gas Giveaway itself, the process by which Irish politicians, one of whom was subsequently convicted of corruption, changed the law in Shell's interests so that the corporation would not be required to pay a single cent of royalties on the gas it extracts. The depth of the current capitalist crisis, and perhaps even some guilt about what Shell has got away with, has begun to result in a minor breaking of ranks. *The Irish Times* carried an 'opinion piece' on June 19 from Andy Storey that pointed out the scale of the rip-off and the fact that "if the Government were to take only a modest 10% stake in these discoveries then the exchequer would stand to gain a staggering €5 billion." And that this would mean there would be "no need for such measures as the closure of three wards in Crumlin children's hospital because of a €9.6 million deficit." (42)

Indeed, Storey's estimate of the value of the gas and oil offshore is very conservative. Official estimates of reserves at the high prices of gas and oil of two years back would give potential values up to €950 billion. A 10% royalty on the real value of even a quarter of this would be sufficient to reverse every single cut in services and wages that has come about so far during the recession, and to cancel all the future planned ones. In fact, some estimates of the total off-shore energy reserves have been as high as €3,500 billion! That is the scale of the Great Gas Giveaway and explains why, both the political parties that changed the law to allow the giveaway, and the corporations that benefit from it are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to protect such incredible wealth from those who need it most.

What stands in their way are the local people of Erris - who are concerned about the risk the penny pinching of Shell is exposing them to (sending 'Shell to Sea' on an off-shore refinery would only cost €100 million of these hundreds of billions) - and the small but determined number of people from all over Ireland who have looked at their story, looked at the Gas Giveaway and are determined to stand

up to the behemoth that is bearing down on them. Vast quantities of money are being spent on PR and policing because Shell and the state know they can win as long as those resisting are kept isolated, as long as the mass of the population of the Ireland is kept in confusion over the issues. Their weakness is the risk that outrage over the scale of the huge rip-off that the abolition of royalties amounts to will spread among people in Ireland - that we will become aware that the money which could have funded our health and education needs and headed off many of the deep cuts on our wages and standard of living is instead to flow into the coffers of a multi-national.

Notes:

The Politics ie thread at <http://www.politics.ie/foreign-affairs/611194-irish-involved-bolivia-assassination-attempt.html> was invaluable in researching this article, great thanks is due to the people who spent a lot of time ferreting out much of the information I use.

For background information on the struggle in Erris or to find out how you can help to fight the Great Gas Giveaway see <http://www.dublins2s.com>

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