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'Panorama' says questions remain to be answered

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GERRY MORIARTY, Northern Editor

THE BBC's *Panorama* programme is standing by what it says was the essence of its recent broadcast about the 1998 Omagh bombing, that crucial intelligence was held back from frontline police investigators.

John Ware, the reporter who presented last September's programme which queried whether the Real IRA bombing could have been prevented, yesterday insisted critical questions remained to be answered.

Ware defended the programme against an official inquiry by the UK's intelligence services commissioner Sir Peter Gibson, who was critical of the *Panorama* investigation. The programme, *Omagh: What the Police were never Told*, reported that the British intelligence monitoring agency GCHQ was recording mobile phone conversations between some of the bombers as they drove to Omagh on August 15th, 1998.

Sir Peter found that in the days surrounding the bombing and on the day itself, "to the extent that any relevant intelligence was derived from interception", it was shared with the RUC and RUC Special Branch "promptly and fully" and in accordance with agreed procedures. "Any intelligence derived from interception as might have existed could not have prevented the bombing," he reported.

However, Ware, in a detailed rebuttal published yesterday, said that Sir Peter did not deal with "the core" of the *Panorama* programme about the bombing which claimed the lives of 29 people and two unborn children and injured hundreds more.

Ware said that the programme did not specifically allege that the bombing could or should have been thwarted, but argued instead that the extent of how information gathered by GCHQ was passed on raised questions about whether the bombing could have been prevented.

Centrally, Ware argued that Sir Peter's report did not deal with the key point of the programme, that information received by the RUC Special Branch from GCHQ was not

promptly or properly passed on to the frontline detectives.

“Unfortunately, Sir Peter’s review does not cover what happened to that [GCHQ] intelligence after it was received by Special Branch and that was at the core of the *Panorama* programme. This failure to share intelligence was at the very heart of the *Panorama* programme and its omission from Sir Peter’s report leaves a gaping hole in our knowledge of the tragedy that surrounds Omagh.”

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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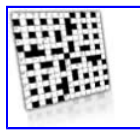
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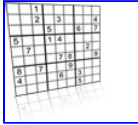
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