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PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L)

cc PS/Mr Scott (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L) 22/
PS/Mr Bloomfield
Mr Brennan
Mr Buxton
Mr Gilliland
Mr Lyon
Mr Maccabe

2 SEC / 18

BOMB ATTACK NEAR NEWRY ON 20 MAY

At today's Morning Meeting, the Secretary of State noted that the Chief Constable had put out a statement yesterday evening (text now received and attached at Annex A) in which he had expressed an intention to contact the Commissioner of the Garda Siochana with a view to arranging early meetings between themselves and other senior officers of the two Forces. In effect, the Chief Constable was seeking to take advantage of yesterday's incident to drag the Commissioner towards a resumption of normal relations after many months of total withdrawal on his part. PUS recalled that it had anyway been the Secretary of State's intention to remonstrate about the Commissioner's attitude when he next saw Mr Barry; and he (PUS) suggested that it might now be opportune for the Secretary of State to attempt to speak to Mr Barry on the telephone within the next day or so, in order to refer to the Chief Constable's request for talks and to ask that Irish Ministers should "encourage" the Commissioner to respond positively.

2. The Secretary of State welcomed the suggestion - with the proviso that, before he spoke to Mr Barry, he would need to be assured that the Chief Constable's communication had actually reached the Commissioner. You have since told me that your enquiries have shown that the earliest that Mr Barry will be reachable by telephone will be early tomorrow.

3. In the meantime, the Chief Constable has gone firm on the terms of his letter to the Commissioner; a copy is attached at Annex B. It has been sent by telex this afternoon and we have since had confirmation of its arrival at Garda Headquarters.

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4. Predictably, Dublin has already counter-attacked on the Chief Constable's claim in his statement that "the RUC are satisfied that the explosives used and the terrorists involved came from the Republic of Ireland". This morning Garda Headquarters asked RUC Headquarters on the telephone what evidence there was for this. The RUC spokesman replied that at this early stage the evidence was still being collected. About midday the Gardai went public in Dublin to the effect that the RUC had admitted that they had no evidence to substantiate the claim.

5. It seems highly likely that Mr Barry will raise the same point. The truth of the matter is that, whilst we cannot be sure that the operation itself was mounted from Co Louth, it is overwhelmingly probable both that the perpetrators were from that side of the border and that the explosive used was brought from that side - which are the two points on which the Chief Constable was expressing himself "satisfied". We need not be forced onto the retreat about this:

- (a) the incident was indisputably "on" the border (Annex B) and it is a matter of common sense to suppose that exploitation of the border was an important element in its planning and execution;
- (b) the Taoiseach was the first to speak of the Gardai rendering every assistance to track down and arrest those responsible - indicating that it was clearly in his mind that they were likely to seek refuge in the Republic;
- (c) if exchange of information between the two police forces was nearer the level that we would like, we should be correspondingly better informed of who was doing what on the border.

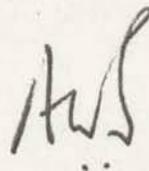
6. The Secretary of state wished to have the latest information on the details of the incident. You will have seen Mr Maccabe's further minute of today. This fills in most of the missing facts but still leaves some uncertainty about whether the security precautions for this RUC activity were fully adequate. It is thought rather unlikely that PIRA were specifically aware of the money-escorting

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process, and more likely that they had simply noticed a tendency for RUC vehicles to stop and turn at that point on the road, just short of the border. But this practice in itself will obviously have to be conducted more carefully in future.

7. The Secretary of State also mentioned the recent press report (Barry Penrose in the Sunday Times, I think) that certainly PIRA activists had moved from Co Donegal to Co Louth; might they be connected with this attack? The particular claim was that McFarlane, a leading Maze escapee, had made this move. There have in fact been reports that McFarlane has been withdrawn from the active OTR strength on the Western border, for one reason or another (possibly suspension); but we have no reason to think either that he is in the Dundalk area or that he was involved in this attack. Regrettably the Dundalk PIRA have a quite sufficient RCIED capability without needing reinforcements.



A W STEPHENS

21 May 1985

THE CHIEF CONSTABLE, THIS AFTERNOON, VISITED THE SCENE OF THE EXPLOSION AND HAD DETAILED DISCUSSIONS WITH DIVISIONAL AND LOCAL COMMANDERS IN NEWRY.

HE DESCRIBED THE ACTS WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT THE MURDER OF FOUR RUC OFFICERS THIS MORNING AS SUB HUMAN AND SO HORRIFIC THAT NO SANE OR CIVILISED PERSON COULD BE ASSOCIATED WITH THEM IN DEED OR THOUGHT.

THE CHIEF CONSTABLE EXPRESSES ON BEHALF OF THE MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY AND ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY RESERVE, HEARTFELT SYMPATHY TO THE FAMILIES AND RELATIVES OF THE MURDERED OFFICERS.

THE R.U.C. ARE SATISFIED THAT THE EXPLOSIVES USED AND THE TERRORISTS INVOLVED CAME FROM THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND, AND THEY EMPHASISED THE NEED FOR THE CLOSEST COOPERATION BETWEEN THE GARDA SIOCHANA AND THE R.U.C.

THE R.U.C. APPRECIATE THE ASSURANCE OF THE TAOISEACH THAT ANY AND EVERY HELP WILL BE GIVEN TO TRACK DOWN AND ARREST THOSE RESPONSIBLE.

THE CHIEF CONSTABLE WILL BE IN IMMEDIATE CONTACT WITH THE COMMISSIONER REQUESTING EARLY MEETINGS AT CHIEF AND SENIOR OFFICER LEVEL TO COORDINATE PLANNING AND THE USE OF ADEQUATE RESOURCES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER TOWARDS THE DEFEAT OF TERRORISM.

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21 May 1985

Mr L Wren
Garda Commissioner

The Taoiseach's strong statement of condemnation of the recent tragedy at Killeen and his offer of assistance from the Garda is very welcome. This latest tragedy occurring on the Border and involving a RUC patrol providing escort for bank money travelling North underlines the importance of achieving the closest co-operation and co-ordination of resources in and around the Border area. Only by optimising operational activity in these areas can we reduce the movement of explosives and personnel and stultify the PIRA.

To this end I feel that it is imperative that we meet at the earliest opportunity and as I will be away next week I would suggest a meeting on Thursday or Friday of this present week ie 23/24 May. If you agree I would be willing for such a meeting to take place in Dublin and I would propose bringing with me Senior Assistant Chief Constables Whiteside and Cushley and Chief Superintendent Sinclair.

I have in mind a short informal discussion in private followed by more general discussion with the others perhaps using my letter of 21 December 1984 as a starting point. One of the key areas we might discuss would be the resumption of Divisional Commanders' meetings chaired at Chief Officer level and a review of other arrangements formally agreed at Baldonnel.

I look forward to your early reply.

Chief Constable