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PS/PUS (L&B) - B

cc PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr A W Stephens - B
Mr Semple
Miss Pease
Mr Hodges
Mr Forsythe
Mr Shannon

PROTECTION OF CIVIL SERVANTS

1. You asked for a progress report on the identification and protection of staff who are considered to be most at risk in the light of recent events.

CURRENT SITUATION

2. I cannot speak with any authority on activity in the NICS but I understand the homes of those on the list of Permanent Secretaries and Under Secretaries which were passed to the RUC are now under increased surveillance by RUC patrols. Crime prevention officers have already or will soon have visited everyone on the list and Special Branch are carrying out individual threat assessments. It is unlikely that any will be subject to a specific threat, but it is likely that, because of the general level of threat, some will be assessed as needing a degree of protection under the VIP Protection Scheme (VIPPS). This work will be carried out by PANI with the utmost urgency.

3. Within the 'law and order' field Mr Forsythe and I started the re-assessment exercise from a mixed base. Some but by no means all senior staff in this field have been given some form of protection either under the VIPPS if they are in their own homes or directly by the NIO if they live in PSA houses. For example at one end of the scale, because of threats in the past, the DPP receives the highest level of protection (including escorts and static guards); similarly most of his senior presenting staff have been given security measures at their homes under the VIPPS. At the other end of the scale, although the Crown Solicitor and his staff are regularly engaged in sensitive proceedings, such as extradition of

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terrorists, neither he nor his staff have any protective measures.

4.

5. Most HCS members of the NIO in Northern Ireland are housed in PSA-owned property, bought by the NIO in areas recommended by the RUC as being 'safe'. Except in cases of a specific threat to the occupant, most of these houses have only modest, low-profile security measures. We have relied for protection upon anonymity and the awareness of our staff to the risks they face. The exceptions to this rule are the houses of _____, all of which have been 'hardened' in line with RUC recommendations to withstand the threat of attack by Loyalist paramilitaries.

NEXT STEPS

6. The 'risk profile' of any individual comprises:

- a. The paramilitaries' intentions: there may be a general threat by PIRA to all civil servants, and a higher level of threat against all senior civil servants; but if any individual in the course of his job antagonises PIRA paramilitaries or is seen by them to be an important target they may have a much higher incentive to attack him or her;

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- b. The means at their disposal: PIRA have re-armed and demonstrated their ability in the Belfast area to attack "targets" with a wide variety of effective weapons over an increasingly wide area;
- c. The vulnerability of the intended target: some staff either in the course of their work, at home or when travelling may be much more vulnerable than others. Clearly terrorists will attack those who are most vulnerable in order to minimise the risks to themselves.

7. Within the NIO we are re-evaluating the risk-profiles of our most exposed and most vulnerable staff. We cannot make the assumption that PIRA will share our views on which staff are important; relatively junior staff may be seen as being important in some local context. Hence Divisional Heads have been asked to provide brief 'risk-profiles' on their staff whom they consider to be most at risk. This task is almost complete although some supplementary information is being sought. NICS Departments are compiling similar lists, and Mr Forsythe and I will be meeting DFP officials on Wednesday morning to categorise and prioritise those on the lists.

8. Roughly speaking we envisage two categories to emerge. There will be those who, because of the high-profile of their jobs and/or their vulnerability, will merit consideration under the VIPPS. Below that there will be a broader category of staff who are not at sufficient risk to be included in the VIPPS but who nevertheless may merit some more modest degree of protection. PANI's "£1000" scheme - which I believe allows an Establishment Officer to authorise a modest package of security measures within a cost limit of £1000 without having to bother hard-pressed Special Branch or VIPPS staff

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- offers a useful precedent for such a scheme. Following the Wednesday meeting it is hoped that a "worked-up" proposal can be put forward. Such an approach would allow us to meet the concerns of staff who are at modest risk promptly and at modest cost. The alternative of trying to process all such cases through Special Branch for a threat assessment and then through the VIPPS would swamp both organisations and is just not practicable.

9. Whilst this work was and is proceeding we have been working with the RUC's Security Branch to reassess the protective measures needed to counter the current means of attack. The recommendations on protective measures and advice to staff which the RUC have continued to give until the recent attack upon Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, have been geared to a ballistic type of attack. One of the weaknesses in the advice provided by the Security Branch is that they are only aware of the security threat in the most general terms (unlike the Security Branch in the Metropolitan Police which is an integral part of Special Branch). At a meeting with Security Branch officers, at which a number of PSA's protective measures staff was present, on Thursday 22 September, we reviewed the threat and invited them to re-think their approach.

10. We will be re-convening on the evening of Wednesday 28 September, again with appropriate experts from London, to agree on the most appropriate countermeasures. Ideally these should be unobtrusive to avoid attracting attention to houses which might not be compromised; they should provide some warning to the occupants of any intrusion and provide some degree of deterrence to the attacker by warning him that his approach has been detected; finally they should allow the occupants to warn the police and be assured of a rapid response to the alarm. Clearly such measures must create the minimum number of false alarms, which would debilitate the occupant (perhaps leading him to switch off the equipment) and distract the police from other operational duties.

11. Immediately thereafter (on 29 September) the RUC's Security Branch staff assisted initially by other experts from GB, will

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commence their programme of inspection of the homes of those most at risk, using the prioritised list referred to in para 7 above.

12. An important consideration throughout has been that we should be seen to treat all civil servants who are deemed to be at increased risk - whether in the NICS or HCS - in exactly the same manner. We will report progress.

signed

P COULSON

26 September 1988

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