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SEC 12 MAR 1996
CENT SEC

From: Jacqueline Black
Political Affairs Division
8 March 1996

- cc PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir David Fell - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Shannon - B
- Mr Daniell - B
- Mr Wood (B&L) - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mrs Brown - B
- Mrs Collins - B
- Mr Cornick - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mr Beeton - B
- Mr Burnett - B
- Mr McKervill
- Chief Constable, RUCHQ
- Mr Hanna, RUCHQ
- Brigadier Strudley, HQNI
- Mr Gillies, HQNI
- CIVSEC, HQNI

1. Mrs Legge
2. Mr Thomas
14/3

C

Mr Steele - B

SECURITY INFORMATION GROUP

I attach the record of the meeting of the Security Information Group which was held on Wednesday 6 March 1996.

(Signed)

J A BLACK (MRS)
SH Ext 27090

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MEETING OF THE SECURITY INFORMATION GROUP ON WEDNESDAY 6 MARCH 1996
AT 2.30 PM IN STORMONT HOUSE

Present:

Mr Steele
Mr Cornick
Mrs Black

Brigadier Strudley
Mr Gillies
Mr Hanna

Apologies for Absence: Mr Watkins, Mrs Brown, Mr McKervill

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 February were approved.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The former GOC had now departed from Northern Ireland but had not made a farewell speech.

3. GENERAL REVIEW

Since the last meeting of SIG, PIRA had ended its ceasefire on 9 February with a bomb at Canary Wharf, followed by a bomb scare in Shaftesbury Avenue, and a premature explosion on a bus in Aldwych had killed the person who was transporting the bomb. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It was unclear whether PIRA would announce another ceasefire.

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It was encouraging that the Loyalist ceasefire was holding, and what appeared to have been some potential splinter action had been contained, however punishment attacks by both Republican and Loyalist groups had continued.

Some troops had been brought back to Northern Ireland and a further battalion could return if necessary at 7 days notice, but the response of the RUC and Army was generally being seen as in line with the breakdown of the ceasefire. The re-insertion of sangars at Bessbrook had caused some local difficulties but had been handled well with much effort, including from the Civil Representatives, and Brigadier Strudley noted that Councillor John Fee (SDLP) had been particularly helpful in Crossmaglen.

The bomb at Canary Wharf appeared to have achieved what was felt to be its objective of healing fissures in PIRA. It appeared that PIRA could not avoid action in certain circumstances, for example, if there was frustration amongst its volunteers; possibly if there had been a Loyalist backlash or heavy-handed response by the security forces to the bomb; or if its back was against the wall. This might be put to the test in the forthcoming elected process when the Mitchell report and decommissioning would have to be addressed right from the start.

On the political front the picture was also unclear. The Joint Communiqué on 28 February announced that there would be intensive multilateral consultations with the relevant Northern Ireland parties between 4-13 March which would lead to an elective process and all-party negotiations on 10 June. The parties were not at present in agreement over the format of any election (18 constituency, 5 member PR/STV or a province-wide list system) or whether a referendum should be held. In the event that agreement was not possible the Government would take the decision. Other obstacles had also been encountered. Unionists had refused to enter Castle Buildings, while the SDLP had refused to talk to anyone other

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than in Castle Buildings. Meetings were therefore taking place in both Belfast and London. In addition differences of opinion between the Secretary of State and David Trimble over what had or had not been discussed at the time of the Scott report had led to further difficulties. Sinn Fein was the only party not at present involved in the process but Gerry Adams had been given a propaganda coup when he arrived at, but was excluded from, Castle Buildings.

A separate area of concern was the forthcoming marching season. The RUC had been attempting to reach some compromises on re-routing but with no success thus far. At Drumcree in particular both sides remained intransigent. The NIO would now be attempting to reach some compromises with Orange Order leaders over the whole issue and Mo Mowlam also appeared to be seized of the problems. On 23/24 March Sinn Fein would be holding its Ard Fheis and on 24 March there would be a Sinn Fein parade at Lurgan over which there was the threat of a judicial review (but any decision either way would not solve the problems). This would be preceded by a parade on St Patrick's Day and with the current position of Sinn Fein it was felt that at these parades it was now more likely that there would be confrontation with the RUC.

4. KNOWN MEDIA PLANS

No major interviews were planned for the immediate future.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Information Strategy

Noel Cornick, as Head of Communications Strategy, would be considering the whole question of Information Strategy. Brigadier Strudley re-affirmed the previous offer of resources from MOD.

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(b) NIO Advertising Campaign

Two companies were now competing for the new NIO advertising campaign, but it seemed likely that the present company would retain the contract.

(c) Omnibus

The new edition of 'Omnibus' featured an article on members of the TA serving in Bosnia.

(d) D Notice Committee

The Secretary of the D Notice Committee would be in Northern Ireland on 20 March to meet officials, along with local editors and programme directors.

6. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of SIG will be held on Wednesday 3 April 1996 at 3.00 pm in Stormont House Conference Room.

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