

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SECURITY INFORMATION GROUP HELD IN  
SPOB OPERATIONS ROOM ON 8 JANUARY AT 3PM

Present

Mr Leach (Chair)  
Mr Burnett  
Mr McKervill  
Mr Webb (Secretary)

Mr Gillies  
Mr Hanna

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

There were no comments on the minutes.

MATTERS ARISING

2. There were no matters arising.

GENERAL REVIEW: SECURITY SITUATION

3. Mr Leach commented Republicans still seemed to be aiming for an entry to talks after some kind of a ceasefire. Their prime objective was however to keep the movement together and make progress through the "dual strategy". Militarily they had not been very successful over the past month. There were signs that units were rusty and prone to abort operations at the first sign of trouble. There was also widescale fear of penetration. As a result, PIRA had been forced to switch to cruder style of attacks.

4. The Loyalist ceasefire appeared to be holding, but could be provoked by an IRA attack at any moment. There was some evidence the Copeland attack was in response to the Dodds assassination attempt and more a "shot across the bows" than an attack intended to launch a renewed Loyalist campaign. The Loyalists were anxious to remain in talks, meanwhile the relationship between Sinn Fein and the SDLP appeared to be cooling. The main event in the talks over the coming weeks was likely to be a challenge to the status of the Loyalist parties' participation. The impasse on decommissioning also remained with the Unionists vulnerable to UKUP/DUP pressure, and were extremely worried at the prospect of Sinn Fein re-entering the process following a renewed ceasefire.

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5. Mr Hanna said the RUC were annoyed by the continued life of the "calling card" theory. Journalists like Breen Moloney and Holland were continuing to push this theory, but there were signs of increasing scepticism among local commentators. We have been extremely fortunate there have been no major casualties so far, this was largely as a result of high public vigilance and co-operation with the security forces. There was a risk that hoax calls might be designed to lure in security forces to an attack. As for the information response to these attacks, the Chief Constable was taking a lower profile now, and incidents were being responded to by police officers on the ground.

6. Mr Hanna said RUC work continued on punishment beatings, or "paramilitary-style assaults" as was now the agreed RUC term. FAIT continued to take a strong line, and the RUC were quoting some recent comments on the assaults by surgeons dealing with the victims. The RUC were also working on their Internet site. This now includes pictures of particular attacks, for example the damaged incubator from the Royal Victoria Hospital. The RUC felt a full time operator was needed to work the Internet properly, but was content that its page was getting increasing coverage as measured by the number of "hits". They were currently wondering what to do when E-mail enquiries were received.

7. Mr Leach said home searches were returning as negative news items. It might be worth stressing the availability of compensation to put houses right after searches.

#### Information effort

8. Mr Burnett said that the go-ahead had now been received for a campaign against paramilitary intimidation. This was being discussed with McCann Erickson. Mr Webb commented that within the NIO the possibilities were being discussed of parallel media work, possibly including the release of a brochure with statistics and lines to take on these assaults. Mr Hanna and Mr Gillies were keen for their organisations to be kept in touch with this campaign.

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Mr Leach suggested the NIO would circulate papers among members of SIG. [ACTION: CMT]

#### Forthcoming events

9. Mr Leach said the coming weeks were going to be busy particularly in the policing area. The Fundamental Review was due to be released on possibly the 15 or 16 January, on 22 January HMIC's report was due, 16 January saw the triennial review by the ICPC and on 23 January the Hayes report on the structure of police complaints. The North report was due to be published on 30 or 31 January. These reports were likely to be generally helpful, although some use could be made of the initial draft of the PBR report to attack us.

10. The other main forthcoming event was the 25th anniversary of Bloody Sunday. Mr Gillies said the Army were particularly concerned about this given the imminent presence of 3 PARA battalions in the Province. Mr Leach suggested that we should not ignore the anniversary. It might be worth making a statement if not on the anniversary itself in the vicinity of it. NIO would collate previous lines to take on Bloody Sunday and look at the options for restating them. We would keep HQNI in touch.

11. Mr Hanna reported forthcoming television programmes by Counterpoint on 16 January and Spotlight on 25 January about dealing with RUC issues. Mr Webb recorded contacts we had had with Tony Geraghty, author of "Who Dares Wins" who is currently writing a book on the British Army in Ireland.

#### DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12. The next meeting will be held on 5 February in Stormont House Conference Room at 3pm.

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