

228/96

FROM: STEVEN SWEENEY
Security Policy and Operations Division
3 April 1997

- cc PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Shannon - B
Mr Daniell - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mrs Collins - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Crawford - B
Mr Margetts
Mr Jagelman - B
Mr Burnett - B
Chief Constable, RUC HQ
Mr Hanna, RUC HQ
Supt McConnell, RUC HQ
Brigadier Brims, HQNI
Mr Gillies, HQNI
Mr Moore, HQNI
Civsec, HQNI



Mr Leach - B

SECURITY INFORMATION GROUP: MEETING ON 13 MARCH 1997

I attach the minutes of this meeting.

(Signed)

STEVEN SWEENEY

Ext 27036

C O N F I D E N T I A L

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SECURITY INFORMATION GROUP HELD IN
STORMONT HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM ON 13 MARCH AT 3PM

Present

Mr Leach (Chairman)
Mr Wood
Mr Gillies
Mr Hanna
Mr Margetts
Mr Crawford
Mr Jagelman
Mr Sweeney (Secretary)

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

There were no comments on these minutes.

GENERAL REVIEW: SECURITY SITUATION

2. Mr Leach described the continuing PIRA campaign against the security forces which, with their first major attack in South Armagh, resulted in the fatal shooting of Lance Bombardier Restorick in Bessbrook. In countering the terrorist threat the security forces continued to make a number of significant finds, thereby thwarting terrorist activity. The Loyalist ceasefire however was still holding despite provocation by the Republican groups although Irish security forces had to deal with a crude but viable explosive device found near the Sinn Fein office in Monaghan on 3 March. No group had claimed responsibility for planting this device.

3. Mr Hanna mentioned the recent ominous development of tourist offices in Banbridge and Newcastle being targeted - presumably by Mid Ulster UVF.

POLITICAL SITUATION

4. Mr Crawford appraised the group of the current political situation; the talks were now suspended and the Secretary of State had announced that the process would re-start on 3 June after the
C O N F I D E N T I A L
MB\SPOB1\12404_1 File Ref : 032/002

lection. The Forum was continuing but was likely to be wound up shortly. There were Parliamentary debates scheduled for the following week on the EPA Renewal and the Public Order Order. Mr Leach mentioned that the EPA was only being renewed for one year and that a new Bill would be required in 1998.

PARADES REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION

5. Mr Leach explained that the Commission was about to be set up, a Chairman had been agreed and we were looking to finalise the rest of the Commission. An announcement to this effect could possibly be expected in the week commencing 24 March, just before the end of the consultation period on 31 March. One of the main issues for the new Government would be to decide whether the Commission should receive a decision-making role and, if so, whether that should be implemented prior to this years main marching season. If so legislation would have to be rushed through Parliament in a timescale which might prove impractical. In relation to the Harryville and Dunloy dispute, it was noted that although negotiations were continuing between the two sides, nothing much was happening because of the failure to find any common ground.

INFORMATION EFFORT: MEDIA HANDLING

6. Mr Wood reported that last month's media handling had been relatively satisfactory. The main issue was the murder of Lance Bombardier Restorick and while the Secretary of State, Ministers and Archbishop Eames had all condemned this murder, the incident itself brought forward Mrs McIlroy, who evoked comparisons with Gordon Wilson. Mrs McIlroy's moving account of the murder brought home to everyone the realities of the PIRA terrorist campaign much more effectively than we could ever hope to. These sensible and astute sentiments along with very rational statements from Restorick's parents were all carried nationally by the media.

7. The case of Roisin McAliskey had again been prominent in the press - which illustrated how an item outside our responsibility

ould still be used against us. The Talks parking exercise had been handled quite well, basically because everyone had been aware that nothing was going to come from them, or at least not until after the Election. However, North and the parades issue still raised a lot of attention with the media and had again been brought up at the IGC.

SECURITY ADVERTISING

8. Mr Wood informed the group that the advert "I want to be like you" had increased useful calls to the Confidential Telephone network by 116%. He would check to see if the figure was accurate over the whole of the five week period. The previous week had seen the introduction of the new advert "Timebomb" and there was also to be a re-run of the 1993 "Boys" advert which was to start shortly: both were planned to run until Easter. There was also the possibility of running a poster campaign using the final caption of "Heal the Hate, Free the Future" illustrating that respecting another's tradition didn't mean losing one's own.

9. Mr Leach raised the point of restrictions on advertising and publicity during an Election campaign. Mr Wood said that certain advertising was permitted but anything new, whether approved or not, was not allowed to be run. Because of this they had nothing scheduled after the end of March.

NISIC PAPER ON MEDIUM TERM INFORMATION STRATEGY

10. This paper has been approved by NISIC and had now been put to the NI Committee to discuss the wider issues. Mr Leach thought that the core message was not as punchy as it could have been but that the paper did cover all the issues. He asked the RUC and the Army what they felt about the paper. They responded that it embodied what was normal working relationships and covered basically what we were all moving toward and trying to achieve, and they were therefore content. Mr Wood said that the day to day working was fine, for example the RUC press office had handled this morning's PRIG

attack on a joint RUC/Army patrol, and there had been no need for NIO involvement. Mr Leach asked whether there was any dissatisfaction within the MOD with the operation of SIG. The Army responded that the day to day links were fine and that SIG was the only structured meeting to focus on overall handling and management. Mr Leach asked for any further comments about the NISIC paper to be put forward through Mr Sweeney.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS: PARADES

11. There was a short discussion on parades, with the St Patrick's Day parade expected to pass off without incident. However, the Easter Tuesday parade in which the Apprentice Boys proposed to march down the Lower Ormeau Road could prove to be a bit more controversial. Mr Hanna also mentioned a parade by the Solidarity - Right to March Group on 22 March in Newtownards. Mr Leach informed the group that the notice of requirement to parade would be increased next month from 7 days to 21 days.

DEFENCE CORRESPONDENTS

12. Mr Gillies explained that Mark Laity was planning on making a Radio 4 programme about the Army and although no dates had been arranged he wished to know if the NIO were content with this. Mr Leach stated that the NIO would be content so long as the normal procedures were followed. [The RUC had put on hold any thoughts of taking journalists to see their training facilities on plastic baton rounds.]

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

13. Mr Leach mentioned that the Secretary of State had received a presentation on Op VERONA which was on trial from May to July prior to deployment. The Secretary of State had mentioned the trialing to Dr Mowlam and both had expressed a wish to go up in this airship. Hopefully this would be on the mainland and there would be little or no press coverage.

14. The office Internet site was raised and Mr Wood stated that there was more hardware ordered and we were due to 'go live' at the end of the month. Mr Leach said that the NIO should liaise with the RUC who were already on the Net. Mr Hanna stated that they found that the Net was very effective but it could also prove to be counter-productive if too much time were spent searching through it.

15. Mr Leach mentioned that the Widgery Report story had quietened down and as the campaigners had now applied for a judicial review the Government's current line was that it was inappropriate to comment as it may prejudice any review. Mr Crawford mentioned adverse nationalist public opinion because of the British refusal to apologise for Bloody Sunday. Mr Gillies felt that a lot of the alleged new evidence on which the judicial review was being sought, could possibly be contained in the Widgery Report as many reporters had failed to read it in detail or had not revisited it since the report was issued.

16. Mr Leach referred to a SCM paper on border policy which was to go to SPM, concerning the sort of infrastructure that the security forces could maintain in order to respond effectively to a resumed terrorist campaign. Mr Margetts was asked to action a sub-group of SIG to look at the presentational aspects of border policy. Mr Gillies said that the Army had considered a 'management of the border area' rather than a 'closed border policy', this would encompass the improvement of surveillance capabilities at static patrol bases.

17. The next meeting was arranged for Wednesday 23 April at 3.00pm.