

**SIR HUGH ORDE OBE
CHIEF CONSTABLE**

20 January 2009

Dear Secretary of State

You asked for my comments, in the light of Sir Peter Gibson's Review of Intercept Intelligence in relation to the Omagh bombing, on the handling by the Police Service of relevant information available to it in the period covered by Sir Peter's Review.

As he makes clear, the police and other security forces in August 1998 were engaged in intensive efforts, particularly in RUC South Region, to thwart dissident republican terrorist attacks. There was, however, no intelligence to suggest that Omagh might be a target. I agree with Sir Peter's conclusion that such information as was available to other Agencies was being passed to Special Branch promptly, in line with agreed procedures. I also strongly endorse his view that none of that information could have prevented the atrocity.

In the immediate aftermath of the bombing the information available to the police from a range of sources was insufficient to trigger immediate arrest or search operations against particular individuals - it was not the case in the hours following the attack, despite media speculation, that the perpetrators' identities were self-evident. The handling by the Royal Ulster Constabulary of the investigation has been the subject of separate scrutiny and was not part of Sir Peter's remit. I do not intend to revisit that area but rather to comment on the current arrangements.

In line with the recommendations made by the Police Ombudsman in her December 2001 report on the bombing, and the subsequent Crompton Report, Serious and Organised Crime Investigation, including Terrorist Crime Investigation and the Intelligence Branch were grouped together within one Department, Crime Operations, under a single Assistant Chief Constable. Special Branch no longer exists, having been replaced by a Branch with service wide responsibility for all intelligence from volume crime to the most serious crime.

A dissemination policy now exists which guides how intelligence is shared for the purpose of criminal investigation, early investigative expertise is sought in cases of serious crime, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland has properly resourced these areas to operate to the highest national standards in respect of handling intelligence and the investigation of serious and organised crime.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hugh Orde', with a few short horizontal lines extending to the right.

HUGH ORDE

Copy to: Professor Sir Desmond Rea, Chairman NIPB

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