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26 June 1985

Dear Robin,

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28/6PIRA BOMBING CAMPAIGN: CO-ORDINATION PROCEDURE

I have reported in a separate letter the meeting between the Commissioner, the Chief Constables concerned and Members of Parliament representing constituencies thought to have been possible targets for bombs. Both that meeting, and the Commissioner's meeting on operational matters with the Chief Constables, were attended by a Home Office official, and the Home Secretary thought the Prime Minister would like a report on the current state of the investigation and the establishment of the co-ordination arrangements under the Commissioner announced yesterday.

As to the progress of the investigation, the police believe that they have now identified the date on which the bomb was placed in the Rubens Hotel, and have confirmed that the clock on the device must have been started some time - probably as much as five days - before it was armed and placed in position. Although their present assessment remains that the bomb at the Rubens Hotel was probably the only one placed, there remains the possibility that others were planted and they are devoting major efforts to finding the bomb store. All but one of the original five people arrested in Scotland are saying very little. One of them has started to give a certain amount of information to the police, some of which, if true, would certainly affect the current assessment; but what he says will require particularly careful assessment because those arrested are hardened terrorists and it is quite possible that he is trying to cause confusion.

Strathclyde police have now arrested the owner of the flat in which the five were found and information which he has provided has led them to another address which was apparently used by the group. The police say that the man, who is being reasonably co-operative, has useful information about the movements of the five main suspects. Two further men have been arrested in Glasgow today, but their questioning is still at an early stage.

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Chief Constables discussed the arrangements in hand in their force areas for the conduct of further enquiries. They agreed upon a common policy in relation to search, namely that there should be no routine searching of hotels and similar buildings because the task was too big to be undertaken thoroughly. Instead, resources would be concentrated upon checks of hotel registers to throw up suspect names, people who had given false addresses or other factors that would put particular premises under suspicion. Hoteliers were, however, being asked to try to the attention of police any indications that panels or fittings had been disturbed.

Some useful traces had emerged within the last 24 hours suggesting links between one of those arrested and Southampton, the strong possibility that one of those arrested had stayed at a Great Yarmouth hotel in May, and a possible lead to the procedure which they had used for making bookings at hotels which might assist the police in narrowing down those which were suspicious.

As to co-ordination of the enquiry, Chief Constables will be seconding officers to the co-ordination centre at Scotland Yard, probably during the course of tomorrow. But the co-ordination centre is already open, and will operate from 8 a.m. to midnight every day. It will combine intelligence, operational and press functions. Through it police forces will be kept updated on intelligence matters, and will contribute information coming into their possession. On operational matters, they will report the results of enquiries, and will in particular put on to a computer at the centre suspicious names in hotel registers for immediate comparison with those emerging from other force areas. For press purposes, the centre will keep forces updated on information available to the press, and will serve as a point of reference for individual forces to ensure that they do not adopt a press line significantly different from others. The co-ordination centre will also serve as the clearing house for requests for any forms of special assistance. The army have already offered to run special training courses over the next few days in certain aspects of search procedure, and are considering withdrawing nine search teams from Northern Ireland and six from Germany.

The Commissioner will hold further meetings as necessary with the Chief Constables, and there will be additional briefing of heads of provincial Special Branches on the intelligence situation, the first of which will take place next Monday.

Separately from the co-ordination arrangements, the Commissioner is seeing editors and representatives of the London offices of provincial newspapers tomorrow, not for a news briefing but to describe the procedures which the police are establishing. He proposes to keep in regular touch with them to establish the sort of relationship which, in the worst case, may assist in handling any exceptional measures which the police might need to take if there proved to be an increased likelihood of bombs having been concealed. In particular, individual forces will be working with the Metropolitan Police on evacuation procedures, including procedures for informing the public of what will be required of them if such measures become necessary.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, perhaps inevitably, Chief Constables expressed serious concern about the financial implications of the heavy overtime commitments which they will now be incurring. We shall no doubt hear more of that.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

1 MR ~~WARD~~^{WARD}
 2 PS/SOFS (B) M
 PS/MR SCOTT (LTB) M
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Yours MV
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