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FROM: R J ALSTON
US(POL)

12 May 1992

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13 MAY 1992
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- cc PS/PUS (L&B) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Thomas (L&B) - B
- Mr Deverell - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Wood - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Cooke - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Rickard - B
- Mrs Black - B

*Mr Mc Connell
Unread. I'm afraid.
For ~~your~~ advice by
on 18 May opt.*

MR LEDLIE - B

12/5

INFORMATION STRATEGY GROUP

You will have seen the Private Secretary's note to me earlier today. He requests that the proposed discussion paper should come forward fairly shortly.

2. Subject to your views I think that the first draft of the paper for incoming Ministers, circulated with my minute of 24 March, should be well suited for that purpose. (You will recollect that, for that purpose, it was redrafted to enlarge its scope somewhat beyond Security Information Strategy issues).

3. I am re-circulating the draft with this minute for the convenience of copy recipients. It would be helpful if any comments or proposed amendments could reach me by close of play on 18 May.

[signed RJA]

R J ALSTON
Ext 2507

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INFORMATION STRATEGY

The management of the Government information effort in Northern Ireland is particularly complicated because of the terrorist problem, the multiple audiences involved, shared responsibilities with the security forces, and the need to present a wide range of policy areas as parts of a single overall strategy.

2. The Government's information effort is part of the battle with the terrorist organisations for support within the community. It is also a critical part of the task of securing public acceptance in different parts of the community for the nature of and the limits to security policies. There is constant scope for refining what we do and how. This paper looks at the principal target audiences inside Northern Ireland and more broadly, and attempts to identify priorities for the information effort.

3. What follows is guided by three underlying factors.

- (a) there will continue to be three distinct information efforts (NIO, RUC and Army) which should nonetheless be co-ordinated as closely as possible;
- (b) no amount of information activity will make much head way unless it is based on convincing policy and operational decisions; and
- (c) much security information work will remain responsive but there is scope for tying this into a broader and more proactive strategic framework.

Information Strategy

4. What is information strategy? The objectives of information strategy are largely those of the policy of defeating terrorism more broadly. Information strategy is also governed as to content by policy decisions taken on their own merits. Public impact is however an important element of many policy decisions. Information

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Strategy is essentially the complex of means by which we seek to influence opinion outside government in pursuit of our strategies for defeating terrorism (which encompass political, social and economic policy as well as security policy itself), and to secure support for the means by which we are pursuing them.

Audiences/Target Groups

5. An effective information strategy requires definition of the audiences at which it is aimed, and the distinctive characteristics of each. Our primary focus is on Northern Ireland. Opinion in the Province can be sub-divided in many ways. At an initial level there are four main headings:

(a) **Opinion in general.** This is the level at which we seek to get across the Government's general commitment to the Province and determination to bring terrorism to an end. It is also the level at which we seek to demonstrate the will and resources to achieve this. In support of this we seek to demonstrate the continuing level of activity, the principles upon which it is based, and the successes achieved including convictions in the courts. There are areas of policy, such as prison management, where we have a good story to tell which is applicable to both communities. There are services relating to the security situation which are available to both communities, such as compensation, which we want to set in a positive light. In addition we seek to secure public support (or at least understanding) for actions we have to take because of the security situation, and encourage the community to play its part;

(b) **The Provisional movement.** This is largely impervious to criticism and thrives on publicity. There are however doubts within the Movement as to where their campaign is going. This provides scope for review to see how (both privately and publicly) we can reinforce this trend in terms of the movements internal psychology;

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(c) **The broader nationalist community.** The aim here is to maximise support for security policy and for constitutional approaches, and to minimise that for the IRA and (so long as it openly supports violence) Sinn Fein. Important elements of this are to increase awareness of the extent to which the nationalist agenda has been addressed over the past decade, to emphasise our respect for human rights, to underline the various ways in which confidence is a major factor in security policy, and to increase awareness of other ways ^{EG} (Making Belfast Work, Targetting Social Need) in which the interests of the ^{RDS} Border nationalist community are being met. We should co-opt the Irish Government in this process to the maximum extent;

(d) **The Protestant community.** The key notes here may be described as reassurance, realism, responsibility and self-confidence. We need to get across the Government's commitment to the present constitutional position, to persuade Protestants that the present balanced approach to security policy is right, to encourage full support for it and to increase awareness that measures (such as those under the Anglo-Irish Agreement) which address nationalist concerns are not a zero sum game.

6. We also have to have concern for a number of broader audiences. These include:

(a) **Great Britain.** [This is an integral part of the overall policy of defeating the IRA, and was discussed at the November 1991 Downing Street meeting.] Since the IRA's aim is to persuade HMG to abandon Northern Ireland, support and understanding in Great Britain of the Government's position and policies and the need to stand up to the IRA both inside and outside the Province is critical. It is however

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an area in which NIO Ministers share the lead with colleagues. Some thought has been given to ways of improving co-ordination in the presentational field with the other Departments involved. More use could be made of Cabinet Office committees. There may be scope for including presentational issues in discussion between the various agencies involved in counter-terrorism;

- X (b) **Ireland.** Paradoxically, this is more in our hands than those of the Embassy because the Irish media take most of their coverage from their own correspondence in the Province. The previous Secretary of State made one major speech in Dublin, gave two interviews to Irish papers and appeared on Irish TV. A number of lesser measures have also been put in hand. The need now is less to secure broad support for Government policies than to arouse more positive interest in Irish political and public opinion in the problems of Northern Ireland and how to resolve them;
- (c) **Elsewhere.** Attitudes in Europe and, above all, the United States are of major importance in the fight against terrorism. They are co-ordinated by NIO (London) with the FCO and are not further considered here.

Information Policy Priorities

7. A significant proportion of the information effort will always be responsive, seeking to demonstrate that security policy is both appropriate and adequate. It is however also extremely important to operate proactively in seeking the widest possible support (and minimising that for the terrorists) by emphasising the following areas:

- (a) The realities of the security effort and the principles which underpin it;

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- (b) the close linkage in the fight against terrorism between security policy as such and the whole range of the Government's political, economic and social policies;
- (c) promoting the acceptance of the security forces (principally within the Nationalist community); and
- (d) encouraging and supporting those in the community who condemn and work against violence.

Co-ordination with the security forces

8. In addition to day to day contacts between the Northern Ireland Information Service and their opposite numbers in the RUC and the Army, the Information Strategy Group exists to co-ordinate information strategy with the security forces. It operates at two levels; Ministerial, which brings the Secretary of State and Security Minister together with the GOC and the Chief Constable; and official which brings relevant policy and information officials and offices from the two organisations together. The custom has been for the former to meet quarterly and the latter monthly. A good deal of work has separately been put into refining the machinery for handling major incidents to ensure that public positions are taken which reconcile the need for speed, accuracy and prudence. There is nonetheless a sense that there is scope, without prejudicing the operational autonomy of the security force commanders, for;

- (a) Further improvements in co-ordination of information activities with the security forces, particularly in the announcement of operational initiatives; and
- (b) promoting better understanding by the security forces of the community in which they are working (this has implications for a range of security force policies as well as for information activities).

Approaches

9. Officials have identified a number of approaches which could be strengthened in order to promote these objectives. They include;

- / development of a mission statement to which all concerned, whether or not information work is their primary charge, can work;
- / improved internal communication flows so that Ministers and senior officials throughout Government are well informed about policy as a whole and encouraged to play their part in presenting it to the broader community;
- / refinement of presentational material on the overall approach of Government, as well as specific policy areas;
- / expanded resources and analysis so that we 'know our enemy' better, and refine our understanding of the attitudes in the community we are seeking to influence;
- / more carefully planned use of speech opportunities and articles in the National and local media to set out the links between different aspects of policy;
- / more extensive use of advertising campaigns to get across key messages;
- / systematic use, on the basis of proactive briefings, of key groups of opinion formers including journalists and churchmen to get across the basis of Government policy;
- / increased liaison with other Whitehall Departments and Agencies involved in countering IRA terrorism in Great Britain; and

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improved interaction with the security forces, including possible interchanges of staff.

Resources

10. Current staff resources, both in the Information Service and other Divisions, are already fully stretched. Achieving more effective information approach will probably require modest additional resources, as well as giving greater priority to presentational issues in the job descriptions of existing staff. There is also a need for additional training for Ministers and senior officials in dealing with the media.

11. We are dealing with a complex and sophisticated adversary. There is a need to refine our understanding of the psychology and dynamics of the Provisional Movement through careful and sustained analysis of all available material about them. This should extend to the systematic tapping of academic and other professional expertise in counter-terrorism, and to looking systematically at ways in which the techniques of opinion polling and public relations could be adopted to best advantage. (The NIO, together with the security forces and elements of the judicial system, is already developing a new opinion poll, to be conducted regularly, designed to measure evolving public attitudes on a whole range of security and criminal justice issues.)

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Conclusion

12. Policies aimed at bringing terrorism to an end are complex and broad based. Public perceptions of our policies are crucial to their success. The NIO's own effort has to be co-ordinated with those of the RUC and the Army. Existing structures work well but we can never afford to stand still. There is a need for a constant

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search for improved understanding of the various target audiences, and of ways in which we can improve our impact on them. This includes improving the ways in which we co-ordinate our activities with those of the security forces. A number of avenues of approach have been identified, but their effective pursuit is likely to need firm management, endorsement and some extra resources.