

TOP SECRET

22

28

PRIME MINISTERIntelligence in Northern Ireland

On 21st April the MISC 238 Group of Ministers invited me to examine means of obtaining intelligence about the situation in Northern Ireland independent of the Northern Ireland authorities. Following that invitation, an Ulster Working Group of the Joint Intelligence Committee was established to make arrangements for intelligence appreciations and the organisation of intelligence sources. The Group has now ... prepared the attached progress report. It shows that the volume of secret intelligence about Northern Ireland is still small and that no sources have so far been developed independent of the Northern Ireland authorities.

2. The report is critical of the intelligence work of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, but in the past relatively simple methods that do not come up to our own sophisticated intelligence standards have been adequate

TOP

SECRET

for Northern Ireland. The present situation is clearly such that the highest possible standards should be achieved and maintained, and it follows that we must give the R.U.C. all the help we can in the way of advice and assistance in intelligence work, as the report suggests. I am following up the proposal in paragraph 8.

3. As regards the establishment of independent sources, there are practical and constitutional difficulties which make this an unpromising line of action at this stage. For the reasons given in the Report I accept the conclusion that it would be right to concentrate on developing the maximum intelligence coverage primarily by training and supporting the R.U.C., rather than by attempting to establish any entirely independent and undeclared intelligence operations in Northern Ireland. Paragraph 7 shows that we have knowledge of the work of the Northern Ireland Internal Security Committee through the Reports made by our liaison officers to their own Departments. I propose to review these arrangements in three months time.

TOP SECRET

4. I am sending copies of this minute and of the report to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary, and to Sir Burke Trend.

LJC.

¹⁷ 6th August, 1969

TOP SECRET

①
21

UK EYES ONLY

INTELLIGENCE ON NORTHERN IRELAND

On 21st April 1969, the Ministerial Committee on Northern Ireland (MISC 238) invited the Secretary of State for the Home Department to examine means of obtaining intelligence about the situation in Northern Ireland independent of the Northern Ireland authorities. The objectives were:

- (a) to obtain an independent judgement on information already available from the Northern Ireland authorities;
- (b) to obtain additional information on matters where Northern Ireland sources might be ineffective or unreliable. In particular, the Royal Ulster Constabulary had in the past concentrated its intelligence activities on the Irish Republican Army; it has been slow to appreciate the need to cover the Civil Rights Movement and the more extreme Protestant organisations;
- (c) to examine the possibility of establishing independent sources of our own so that the lack of sources not dependent on the Northern Ireland Government might be remedied.

2. It was thought appropriate to formalise arrangements for intelligence appreciations and organisation of sources by invoking the machinery of the Joint Intelligence Committee (A).

Whitchall Organisation

3. Following the invitation on 21st April an Ulster Working Group of the Joint Intelligence Committee (A) was set up on 23rd April under Home Office chairmanship upon which the Security Service,

-3-

UK EYES ONLY

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

UK EYES ONLY

Special Branch, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, MI6 and Ministry of Defence were represented. The Group has met four times to consider questions of organisation and policy: under its direction an Ulster Working Group assessments group meets weekly to prepare the UWG assessments. The assessments group also meets as necessary to make special assessments.

4. In parallel with the organisation of these regular all source intelligence assessments the Home Office has instituted the HONIP series of weekly summaries covering the overall political situation thus providing a reporting background against which to consider the intelligence picture; it is similar in some measure to that normally received from HM diplomatic missions in other circumstances.

The Intelligence Organisation in Ulster

5. The Security Service has appointed a Security Liaison Officer to Northern Ireland; he is accredited to the Inspector-General of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (to whom he has direct access) his duties being:

- (a) to advise the RUC on the provision of security intelligence; to assist in its collation and assessment; and to report on it to the Security Service in London; ~~and~~
- (b) to advise the RUC and other responsible authorities in Northern Ireland on protective security; ~~and~~
- (c) to maintain liaison with the General Officer Commanding in Northern Ireland.

6. The Ministry of Defence have also appointed a Military Intelligence Liaison Officer to the staff of the Security Liaison Officer; he is responsible for acting as a link between the General

-4-
UK EYES ONLYTOP SECRET
© Crown Copyright

TOP SECRET
UK EYES ONLY

Officer Commanding Northern Ireland and the Crime Special Branch of the RUC and for assisting the RUC where possible with arrangements to deal with such internal security situations as may arise.

7. In Northern Ireland, both Liaison Officers are members of an Internal Security Committee which has been newly set up in Belfast with the Inspector-General of the RUC as Chairman. It reports to a Northern Ireland Ministerial Committee. It usually meets on Tuesdays and the Liaison Officers report its conclusions to their Departments in London before the meeting of the JIC Working Group on the following day.

(i.e. Home office officials)

8. It is perhaps unfortunate that the Committee consists entirely of specialists; we have suggested that it might sit under a non-specialist chairman who could introduce a broader and perhaps more political point of view (perhaps the Secretary to the Northern Ireland Cabinet or the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs). This suggestion has not so far been accepted and we are pursuing it not with the RUC but with the Northern Ireland Cabinet Office. Subject to this reservation about the Internal Security Committee, the arrangements for processing information are now working satisfactorily.

9. The volume of secret intelligence is small and our knowledge of the strengths, weapons, organisations and intentions of the IRA and the militant Protestant Paisleyite organisations is consequently inadequate. This is a weakness which could create serious difficulties should the situation in Northern Ireland worsen or continue for long unresolved. Many of the other organisations meet in public and have their plans fully reported in the press and do not therefore present the same problem.

10. Comment by the Security Liaison Officer provides an element of independent judgement, both in respect of his contributions to the Internal Security Committee and in his comments to London on the end

-5-

UK EYES ONLY

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL HAS BEEN RETAINED UNDER SEC. 3(4) OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT 1958 AND 1967

UK EYES ONLY

product of liaison work, and some progress has been made with United Kingdom guidance on improving the organisation of intelligence work in the RUC.

11. However, it should be noted that no matter what improvements are achieved in intelligence organisation this is unlikely to provide a significant contribution to predicting and forestalling acts of disorganised violence carried out by sectarian hooligans; nothing but observation on the streets can provide coverage of the activities of a loaderless mob.

Intelligence Coverage Outside Ulster

12. The Security Service and Special Branch are extending their coverage of the Civil Rights Movement and of the IRA in Great Britain.

13. * [Redacted]

* Postages deleted and returned Sec. 5 (4) J.P.C. 2/19/79

Independent Sources within Ulster

14. Within Ulster our information is derived almost entirely from the RUC. To develop secret sources independent of the RUC would involve both organisational and political difficulties. *

[Redacted]

* On a practical level any source, live or technical, cannot be efficiently exploited within the United Kingdom without the knowledge and co-operation of the local authority*. In the case of Northern Ireland these considerations apply with even greater force because of the constitutional position and if the authorities there became aware

req. the local office, post office etc.

UK EYES ONLY

TOP SECRET

THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL HAS BEEN RETAINED CLOSED UNDER SEC. 3 (4) OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT 1958 AND 1967

UK EYES ONLY

of the existence of such independent sources their confidence in the United Kingdom Government would be seriously undermined. In such circumstances most of the present flow of information, which includes not only intelligence from the RUC but also political information from Northern Ireland Ministers and officials, might come to an end and its loss, and the damage to working relationships generally, would be very serious indeed.

15. The Security Service, in co-operation with Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police, are therefore concentrating on developing the professional and technical expertise of the RUC so that they may mount operations on a wider scale, embracing techniques not yet used by them in Ulster, and establishing long term coverage of targets, such as Protestant extremism, which have hitherto not been part of their traditional pattern of intelligence activity. Nevertheless, it will be a long time before sources and the flow of information from them will be at all adequate. Agent operations inside Ulster will be carried out in collaboration with, or with the knowledge of the RUC.

The communications of the RUC.

Conclusion

16. In all the circumstances it may be considered right to concentrate on developing the maximum intelligence coverage primarily by training and directing the RUC's intelligence efforts and supporting them with sources developed by the United Kingdom agencies rather than attempting to establish any entirely independent and undeclared intelligence operations in Ulster.

Recommendation

17. We recommend that progress on intelligence arrangements to cover the situation in Northern Ireland be reviewed again in three months time.

** Passages deleted and returned under Sec. 3 (4) J.R. Green 4/10/79*

UK EYES ONLY

TOP SECRET