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Roinn an Taoisigh
Department of the Taoiseach

15/10/82

15 October 1982

Mr J Kirby
Department of Justice

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Jim

I refer to our previous correspondence in relation to plastic bullets.

At the request of the Secretary to the Government, following a submission to the Taoiseach on the subject of Government policy on the use of plastic bullets in Northern Ireland, it has been arranged that the issues arising from the Defence Forces possession of rubber bullets should be considered by the Inter-departmental Committee on National Security. In this regard, I am enclosing a copy of a minute which I have to-day forwarded to Mr R Stokes, Chairman of that Committee, together with all the related papers.

Yours sincerely

F Murray

Tithe an Rialtais, Baile Atha Cliath 2.
Government Buildings, Dublin 2.

ROINN AN TAOISIGH 14/10/92

Misc.
P.2.

Uimhir.....

To: Mr. F. Murray
From: W. Kirwan, Assistant Secretary.

Plastic Bullets

1. Please see the reply to Mr. Patrick Canavan, dated 8th October but in fact issued yesterday: also my note of yesterday's date on the outcome to date of our submissions on this entire subject.
2. Will you please copy the letter to Mr. Canavan to the Department of Foreign Affairs, with a request that they convey Mr. Canavan's letter to the British authorities and reiterate to them the Government's deep concern at the misuse of the weapon in Northern Ireland. At the present stage of consideration of our position on this matter, the formal expression of our concern should not go beyond points already made to the British or beyond the formulation by the Secretary to the Government inserted in ink at indent (2) of paragraph 13 of my submission of 5th October. The Department of Foreign Affairs may use their own discretion as to whether there should be any hint or inference, in the tone or content of any verbal commentary used in passing the letter and expression of concern to the British, that an unsatisfactory response would lead or compel us to take a position of more direct and overt opposition to the use of plastic bullets at all by the British forces in Northern Ireland.
3. You will need to copy the papers received from the Departments of Justice and Defence to Mr. Stokes so that he can raise the domestic issues at the inter-departmental security committee. It may help to put their consideration in the wider context, if you copy to him all the papers on this folder, together with Dr. Mansergh's note, as annotated by the Secretary to the Government.

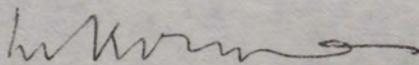
ROINN AN TA'ÓISIGH

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2.

4. I have no objection to and see some advantage in passing all this Department's papers on this matter, including my note of yesterday, to the Department of Foreign Affairs for their information. Unless you see objections, I consider that copies of these papers might also go to the Departments of Defence and, possibly, Justice, at least on a personal basis.

5. Please bring forward the papers again in a week's time so that we can try to get further decisions before the resumption of the Seanad. In the interval, I think Mr. Burke should hold over further contact with Silent Too Long.



W. Kirwan,
Assistant Secretary.

14th October, 1982.

20/8/82



ROINN COSANTA
(Department of Defence),
BAILE ATHA CLIATH
(Dublin).

S760

20, August, 1982.

Dear Frank,

I enclose a note in reply to your letter of the 4th inst. in relation to plastic bullets.

You will note that the Defence Forces have never been equipped with plastic bullets but have, for many years, been equipped with rubber bullets and trained in their use. On only one occasion was one such bullet used some years ago.

The situation arising in Northern Ireland from the death or maiming of civilians by plastic bullets is a new aspect as the general public may not easily discern the difference between rubber and plastic rounds.

Nevertheless these weapons constitute a degree of force well below ball ammunition and, as such, are regarded as a valuable weapon in a riot situation.

For those reasons the military side are anxious to retain them and to continue training in their use.

Meanwhile action to order further rounds has been suspended and the suggestion has been made to the military authorities that their use in an "aid to the civil power" situation might not be considered until the matter has been fully examined.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. F. Murray,
Department of the Taoiseach.

Roinn an Taoisigh
Department of the Taoiseach

4th August, 1982.

SECRET

Mr. J. Kirby,
Department of Justice.

Dear Jim,

Further to our telephone conversation today on the subject of plastic/rubber bullets, I am enclosing for your Department's confidential information copies of recent correspondence between this Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs in this regard.

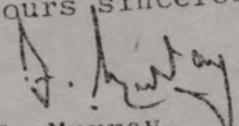
In the course of a review of present policy on plastic bullets, it came to light that our security forces have large supplies of rubber bullets held in store and that standing orders for our forces provide for their use in certain circumstances. The fact that we have these weapons would presumably be known to the British authorities from whom they may well have been purchased.

When this aspect of the matter was drawn to the Taoiseach's attention, he indicated that he was personally unaware that our security forces had stocks of plastic (or rubber) bullets. He considered it most unlikely that use of such bullets would ever be authorised here.

Our understanding is that the stocks of plastic or rubber bullets referred to are held by the Department of Defence. As far as we are aware, your Department or the Garda authorities do not have any such stocks in hands. To enable us to brief the Taoiseach on the matter, I would be glad if you would confirm the position so far as your Department and the Garda authorities are concerned.

We are also pursuing this matter with the Department of Defence.

Yours sincerely,


F. Murray.

Tithe an Rialtais, Baile Atha Cliath 2.
Government Buildings, Dublin 2.



Roinn an Taoisigh
Department of the Taoiseach

4th August, 1982.

SECRET

Mr. J. Mulvaney,
Department of Defence.

Dear John,

Further to our brief telephone conversation today on the subject of plastic/rubber bullets, I am enclosing for your Department's confidential information copies of recent correspondence in this regard between this Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In the course of a review of present policy on plastic bullets, it came to light that our security forces have large supplies of rubber bullets held in store and that standing orders for our forces provide for their use in certain circumstances. The fact that we have these weapons would presumably be known to the British authorities from whom they may well have been purchased.

When this aspect of the matter was drawn to the Taoiseach's attention, he indicated that he had been personally unaware that our security forces had stocks of plastic (or rubber) bullets. He considered it most unlikely that use of such bullets would ever be authorised here.

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Roinn an Taoisigh
Department of the Taoiseach

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Defence Forces. To enable us to brief the Taoiseach on the matter, I would be glad if you would confirm the position so far as your Department and the Defence Forces are concerned. In particular we require the following information:-

- what stocks of rubber (or plastic) bullets are available;
- when these stocks were obtained;
- the source of supply;
- what the standing instructions for their use in certain circumstances are.

We are also pursuing this matter with the Department of Justice.

Yours sincerely,

E. MURRAY

F. Murray.