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*Mr W. C. ...
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SECRET AND PERSONAL

RECEIVED
ANGLO-IRISH SECTION
Time 17.00 Date 16/4

16 April 1987

Mr. Eamon O Tuathail
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division

*cc PSM
PSS
Mr O Tuathail
file
19629
Mr Nalley
Mr Wood (copied already)
Dr
21/4*

Dear Eamon

Sir John Hermon, Chief Constable of the RUC was here for dinner last night and there was a wide-ranging discussion covering various aspects of the political and security situation in Northern Ireland. Daithi O'Ceallaigh is reporting separately on matters other than security co-operation, which is the subject of this note.

Overall there was nothing particularly new about what Hermon said but some of the points may be worth recording.

At the outset, he talked about the threat assessment. It was essential for both police forces to complete, as quickly as possible, the up-dating of this (it was due to have been completed this week if Stephen Fanning had not been preoccupied with other work). The threat assessment would confirm that the threat emanating from the South was substantially the same as before and was a significant aspect of terrorism in Northern Ireland. Command and control of the PIRA (the Army Council) was still effected in and directed from the South, supplies of weapons and explosives were still coming through the South and a worrying aspect of this was that the terrorists had obtained supplies of new weapons in recent times and these were turning up in captures. It was vital to close off these sources of supply and the supply routes. It was also crucial to find and destroy the sources of the home-made mortars which had been used to such devastating effect by the Provos. These mortars were, he said, in the main, made in the South. (He conceded that there might be some small amount made in Belfast). He thought that it should be possible to introduce a requirement for marking gas cylinders which would enable them to be traced (similar to the arrangements for marking detonators used in mining) and he proposed to ask his own senior officers to take this matter up with the Garda Siochana if they had not already done so. He referred to the Home-Made Explosives (HME) research and said that it was vital to bring this to a successful conclusion quickly.

He said that there had been a substantial increase in the level of the threat from within Northern Ireland itself and the up-dated threat assessment would reflect this. The Provos had reorganised and stepped up their activities and had tightened up the organisation to such an extent that it was now more difficult to penetrate them. They had also

embarked on a policy of hitting 'softer' targets in border areas and quieter rural areas where escape was relatively easy (the Portrush murders was an example) largely because of the success the police had had in dealing with them in the Belfast area. The gun used to kill one of the policemen in Portrush had also been used to kill the prison instructor in Derry.

He accepted that relations between the two forces had greatly improved since the Agreement and regarded the opportunity that the Agreement had afforded, through the mechanism of the Conference, as of major significance in relation to improving security cooperation. He was determined to work that to the fullest extent. He had said early on that he would not attempt to tell the Commissioner how to run his force and, in discussion at the Conference, he had made it clear that it mattered less how things were done so long as the results were obtained. In this respect, he was disappointed at what the Garda had achieved to-date. There was still no worthwhile preemptive intelligence coming over - the traffic was still mainly one-way. He was not optimistic that this would substantially improve until the Garda became much more adept at surveillance. This would only come as a result of the thorough training of the right kind of personnel and with more experience. It was not enough simply to take uniformed policemen at random and deploy them with minimal training on surveillance work and hope to defeat the IRA. The RUC had the necessary experience and were willing to help the Garda and to train personnel. He could not see why this offer could not be availed of. He found it hard to understand why the whole anti-terrorist dimension to the work of the Garda Síochána did not merit the appointment (or assignment) of an Assistant Commissioner. He thought that this would represent a 'drop in the ocean' in the context of the total Garda budget and would have a major impact. That, 'and a helicopter or two' could make a difference.

When we referred to the success the Garda had had, particularly in 1986, in the seizure of arms and ammunition he said that that was not really damaging the terrorists unless it was accompanied by arrests and convictions. They were always able to replace the hardware. He compared it to the efforts of the police and customs men in eradicating illicit distilling. It was not enough to seize the poitin - you had to get the people making it.

Even though he recognised and accepted that republican paramilitaries were well trained in anti-interrogation techniques and that interrogation was playing only a small part in getting evidence against terrorists, he still wanted the RUC to have the facility to be involved in questioning suspects in the South. This would be useful to the force in filling out their picture of those involved in terrorist organisations but more importantly - although he did not say this explicitly - it would have a powerful symbolic effect. He had, he said, only recently offered a reciprocal facility to the Garda (to question a suspect in custody in the North) and this was availed of. He wished to see legislation relating to arrest and detention of suspected terrorists changed in the South to bring it into line with that applying in the North.

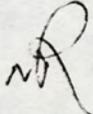
He had been consulted about the British paper on security co-operation and had seen a draft. He agreed with its contents. He saw no problem

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with the suggestion that the quadripartite group should be given an expanded role in this area and did not see it as impinging on his independence in relation to operational decisions. It was essential to have a forum, short of the Conference itself, for discussing questions which were not amenable to solution at police level.

I am sending a copy of this to the Secretary, Department of Justice.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'NR' or 'Noel Ryan' in a cursive style.

Noel Ryan