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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

MOST SECRET

Gibraltar Briefing

~~Taoiseach~~

As arranged, Ambassador Fenn called on Friday afternoon on this.

He repeated his earlier statements that the briefing was for your eyes only and neither the fact nor the content of the briefing would be public. They accept completely your freedom to comment in whatever way you think best on the situation generally, and that you will not be constrained, in any way, by the briefing.

Having said this, the Ambassador went through the attached note in some detail. He said that they could not anticipate the judicial process in Gibraltar and for that reason, paragraphs 11 to 13 of the note simply record facts, most of which are publicly known already. He said that the purpose of the briefing was to let you know, as frankly as possible, the information which the British have on the subject.

The Ambassador also showed me the rules of engagement for the affair, which he said he was not at liberty to leave with me. I did, however, confirm from the document which he showed me the summary of the rules, as given at paragraph 5 and, in particular, the instruction that the first priority of the security forces was to arrest, and "not to use force unless it was necessary to preserve life and there was no other way of doing this". There was also, so far as I can recall, a reference to the possibility of delay in reaction leading to death. At the end of the briefing, the Ambassador mentioned that Foreign Secretary Howe had asked that when it was being given, a message should be conveyed to us on the following lines, about the Government statement on the more recent engagement in Northern Ireland.

The message was to the effect that the British are concerned that the Irish are imperfectly precise in the use of the word "violence". The British have no reservations about the legitimacy of Irish aspirations to unity. They do, however, ask that the Irish Government should recognise the difference between violence used by those whose aim is to overthrow the State and violence arising in the operations of security forces, within the law and for the public good.

Seen by
Taoiseach
5/9.

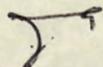
ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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I had not the copy of the statement with me but I told the Ambassador that I thought they were being unduly sensitive about the use of the word "violence". He could rest assured that you, more than most people, were very conscious of the distinction between these two forms of violence and, in particular, of the onerous nature of the duties of the security forces of each of the two countries in their day to day operations. The Ambassador noted the reaction.

There was then some general discussion of the Northern situation generally, during which the Ambassador mentioned that the Prime Minister would be chairing a review meeting in the Cabinet Office tomorrow. This would probably have some bearing on the content of the next Conference and on other issues.



Dermot Nally

5 September 1988.

GIBRALTAR INQUEST - SECRET BRIEFING

The British Ambassador made the following points on 2 September on instructions, for the personal information of the Taoiseach.

1. Following the PIRA car bomb attack at Rheindahlen, West Germany in March 1987, European police forces had been alert to the likelihood of further attacks. This expectation was reinforced by fragmentary intelligence during the year of continued PIRA activity on the continent.

2. On 15 November the Spanish authorities' suspicions were aroused by two travellers who left Madrid en route from Malaga. Subsequent enquiries revealed that the passengers were Daniel McCann and Sean Savage, travelling under the aliases of Robert Reilly and Brendan Coyne. A third person linked with them, a known terrorist calling herself Mary Parkin, was also traced to the Malaga area. McCann (who has a criminal record) and Savage were well known to the security authorities in Northern Ireland. Their activities gave rise to the suspicion that an attack was planned but at that stage the target was not known.

3. In mid February Mary Parkin again came to the notice of the Spanish security authorities, and was noted visiting Gibraltar on a number of occasions. It was clear that she was interested in the guard mounting ceremony held every Tuesday morning outside the Governor's office and involving a parade of up to 60 soldiers. Parkin showed particular interest in the area by Ince's Hall where the troops and band assemble for the ceremony. The guard mounting had been cancelled on 10 November because of demonstrations over forthcoming Anglo-Spanish talks and was further postponed because of refurbishment of the guard house opposite the Governor's residence. The ceremony was restarted on 23 February and Parkin was noted closely observing it. It was assessed that PIRA intended to use a car bomb in the vicinity of the assembly area, and that the attack would be carried out by a group of three, including McCann and

Savage, all of them known to have been involved in carrying out previous terrorist attacks.

4. Given the assessed threat to Gibraltar, and in view of the lack of experience of the Gibraltar police in counter-terrorist matters, the Commissioner of the Gibraltar police approached the British armed forces seeking support. A formal request for such assistance was then made by the Governor of Gibraltar, who has responsibility for the security of the colony, and was approved by UK Ministers, as is normal for requests for military aid to the civil power. It was intended to arrest the terrorists with the help of service personnel, and procedures were worked out to that end. Provision was made for handling of them by the Gibraltar police after their expected arrest (including the preparation of special cell facilities).

5. Rules of engagement were issued. These stipulate arresting the terrorists subject to the over-riding requirement to protect the lives and safety of members of the public and the security forces. The key provision is: "You or your men may only open fire against a person if you or they have reasonable grounds for believing that he/she is currently committing, or is about to commit, an action which is likely to endanger your or their lives, or the life of any other person, and if there is no other way to prevent this".

6. On 4 March McCann and Savage were reported arriving in Malaga where they were met by another woman identified as Mairead Farrell. Because of the alert state of the group surveillance was not maintained by the Spanish authorities. A watch of the border was maintained by the Gibraltar authorities (there is only a single crossing point from Spain). But the terrorists were not under surveillance before they entered the territory on 6 March. This ruled out earlier arrests.

7. Although not identified until later, Savage is known to have driven a white Renault (registration number M 9149 HW) into Gibraltar on 6 March. He had hired this in Malaga the

previous/

previous day. He was not detected at the border (the flow of traffic makes it difficult for identification) but was seen at about 1250 [local time] (still not identified as Savage) parking the car in the assembly area for the guard mounting ceremony. He was seen to spend some time in the car before leaving it. At about 1430, Farrell and McCann were tentatively identified crossing the border on foot, and shortly before 1500 hours they joined Savage in the vicinity of the white Renault. (Identification of all three was confirmed at this point). The three took several close looks at the car together.

8. A radio controlled device was expected to be used because the timing of the attack would be critical, and the guard mounting ceremony is cancelled at short notice if it rains. Moreover a device set off by a timer (by its very nature unstoppable once started except by a return visit to the device) would have resulted, in the event of cancellation, in purely civilian casualties. It was assessed that, in the wake of Enniskillen, PIRA would not have been willing to risk this. Furthermore, the components of a bomb, bearing all the hallmarks of a PIRA device, was discovered in Brussels in January 1988 by the Belgian police. This has a remote control radio device to detonate it, with a range of up to two miles. PIRA regularly use radio controlled devices in Northern Ireland. We now know that the assessment was wrong and that intention was in fact to use the Renault as a "blocking" car. The latter hypothesis was considered at the time but discounted, because on the one hand parking in the area on a weekday is so heavy and careless that the blocking car might well have been boxed in, and on the other because it was believed that parking late on Monday or early on Tuesday would not be difficult: use of a "blocking" car would not be necessary and would entail extra risk for the terrorists.

9. At about 1530 hours all three terrorists left the scene and started to walk back towards the border. A rapid technical examination of the car, which noted an old radio aerial on the relatively new vehicle, strengthened the suspicion that it contained a radio controlled bomb. Once the terrorists had been identified and the car had been abandoned, the Gibraltar police authorities decided that the three should be arrested before they reached the border

crossing point, and requested military assistance to effect this.

10. It was the case that the soldiers had been briefed that the terrorists would probably be armed (and ready to use their weapons) and also that they might be prepared to detonate the expected radio controlled device. The soldiers would therefore have to take appropriate action if they concluded that their lives and the lives of others were under threat. The exact details of what happened next are the subject of the inquest.

11. The Provisional IRA confirmed on the evening of 6 March that the three people shot in Gibraltar were an "active service unit" and in further clarification the following day stated that they "had" access and control over 140 lbs of explosives".

12. Car keys found on McCann's body fitted a red Fiesta (registration Number MA 9317 AF) found on the Spanish side of the border later on 6 March. This car contained false passports (including Irish passports numbers K542817 in the name of John Samuel Miller and J342435 in the name of Mary Johnstone, bearing photographs of McCann and Farrell respectively), an alarm clock, wire, electrical tape, over £2000 and the key to a third car. The vehicle was traced as being hired on 4 March in Torremolinos to an unidentified man called John Oakes who, according to Spanish police, left Malaga for Dublin by air on 6 March. His real identity is unknown. In Farrell's handbag after her death a stolen British passport (but with her photograph in it) was found, number P668418B. Its owner was Katherine Harper. McCann and Savage were found to be carrying false passports, numbers L611839F (British) and J630357 (Irish) in the names of Robert Wilfred Reilly and Brendan Coyne respectively. All these details were passed to the Garda Siochana by the Security Service shortly after the event.

13. On 8 March, a day after PIRA's statement, the Spanish police found a white Ford Fiesta (registration number MA 2732 AJ) in Marbella which contained 62½ kg of Semtex H explosives, two timers (one of 10 and three quarter hours duration and one of 11 and a quarter hour) which had not been started, an AK47 magazine and 200 rounds of

ammunition. The car was opened with the key found in the red Ford Fiesta. It had been hired by Farrell in the name of Katherine Smith in Marbella on 6 March. (Katherine Smith is the married name of Katherine Harper, whose passport was found in Farrell's handbag).

CONCLUSION

14. There is no doubt that, had the attack been successful, the confined nature of the space where it was intended to park the car containing the bomb would have resulted in appalling casualties, even on the Sunday afternoon. The effect on the Tuesday morning would have been unimaginable. The street is surrounded by buildings, a steep bank and a very thick stone wall. Adjacent to the latter are a school and an old people's home.

15. Security forces had sufficient evidence on 6 March of a grave and immediate threat to security which had to be met. Planning had to be conducted on a "worst case" basis. More recent attacks on the security forces in the United Kingdom and on the continent continue to demonstrate the serious nature of the threat posed by IRA "active service units".