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ASST
SEC 16 APR 1996
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From: Jacqueline Black
Political Affairs Division
15 April 1996

440/94

- cc PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir David Fell - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Shannon - B
- Mr Daniell - B
- Mr Wood (B&L) - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mrs Brown - B
- Mrs Collins - B
- Mr Cornick - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mr Beeton - B
- Mr Burnett - B
- Mr McKervill
- Chief Constable, RUCHQ
- Mr Hanna, RUCHQ
- Brigadier Strudley, HQNI
- Mr Gillies, HQNI
- Mr Moore, HQNI
- CIVSEC, HQNI

Handwritten notes:
 Mr [unclear]
 for night use to
 state date of case
 next meeting in case
 Mr [unclear] and
 cannot go.
 16/4

C

1. Mr Steele [There is, I am afraid, not much which can be done about the Sinn Fein entry on the Internet. What can be done is to improve our own material so as to counter Sinn Fein propaganda. sgd JMS 15/4]
2. PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B

SECURITY INFORMATION GROUP

I attach the record of the meeting of the Security Information Group which was held on Wednesday 3 April 1996.

2. Sir John Wheeler's letter of 15 March to the Rt Hon David Maclean MP had noted that he had asked officials at the next meeting of SIG to explore the issue of using the Internet to get the NIO message across. Details of that discussion are at paragraph 4.

[sgd]

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MEETING OF THE SECURITY INFORMATION GROUP ON WEDNESDAY 3 APRIL 1996
AT 3.00 PM IN STORMONT HOUSE

Present:

Mr Steele	Brigadier Strudley
Mr Cornick	Mr Moore
Mr McKervill	Mr Hanna
Mrs Black	

Apologies for Absence: Mr Gillies; Mr Watkins

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 March were approved.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

NIO Advertising Campaign

As expected, McCann Erickson had retained the contract.

3. GENERAL REVIEW

Since the last meeting of SIG, terrorist activities had included a bomb explosion at Fulham, London. The number of punishment attacks had been steadily rising from an average of 10.5 per month in 1993; 16 in 1994; 18 in 1995; to 26 per month in the first three months of 1996. In March there had been 29 such attacks (18 Republican, 11 Loyalist), two of which had been shootings.

Active Service Units of PIRA were in a state of readiness and were continuing activities such as targeting. They had the capacity to strike in GB or Northern Ireland at short notice and might well be

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looking for an excuse to commence activities in Northern Ireland. Meanwhile the Loyalist ceasefire was holding well and Loyalist representatives were conscious of the traps PIRA was setting for them, although an event such as an atrocity in GB or Northern Ireland with casualties, or the killing of a Loyalist paramilitary, might cause activities to re-commence.

The marching season would begin on Easter Monday on the Ormeau Road. A re-routing order had been issued to the Apprentice Boys and it was hoped that there would be no large scale confrontations. Tensions were expected to rise further before the parades on 12 July, especially as PIRA was actively seeking confrontation with the RUC.

On the plus side some good work had brought about the interception of Kevin McAlorum (INLA) at a checkpoint in Lurgan. With the exception of complaints about helicopter flights, the level of other complaints against the Army remained at a low level. Co-operation with the Garda was good and it was important for this to be maintained and expanded in the border areas.

On the political front, there had been no consensus between the parties on the form of an election and the Prime Minister had announced on 21 March that elections would take place using a list system organised on a constituency basis, supplemented by a Northern Ireland wide top-up system. As there were no procedures in place for the registration of parties, the Government had published a consultation paper on 1 April on the designation of parties for the election. 15 parties had been included but various other groupings who felt they should also have been included were now threatening judicial proceedings. The parties were still expressing reservations about an elected body - Unionists wanted the forum to have an influence on any negotiations, while the SDLP did not want any link between a forum (which they considered to be at best a useless talking shop) and the negotiating body, and had not taken any decision on the process itself or on taking its place. The whole process would be in jeopardy if neither the SDLP nor Sinn Fein stood for election. Sinn Fein would have difficulty in explaining non-participation

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not that a date had been set for negotiations to commence, which is what they had asked for. On the other hand, once elected and if the PIRA ceasefire was restored, Sinn Fein would be faced with signing up to the Mitchell principles. The SDLP was concerned that if it took part and Sinn Fein did not then they would be in a difficult position if everything collapsed. At the moment there was little sign of any compromise on any side.

4. USE OF THE INTERNET

Sir John Wheeler had received a copy of a letter from the Rt Hon David Maclean, Minister of State at the Home Office, enclosing some information on the security force deployment in Northern Ireland which was held on the Sinn Fein site on the Internet. The Minister had asked SIG to explore the possibility of using the Internet to get the NIO message across.

The meeting noted that Sinn Fein was using the Internet to good advantage. Its entry was impressive and presentation was good in content and style. An Phoblacht, for example, could be read on the Internet before it was on sale at retail outlets. A site already existed on the Internet for use by the NIO and Northern Ireland Departments, but it was important in addition to monitor the use others were making of the Internet, increase the Government's awareness of the Internet as a pro-active PR vehicle, and ensure good quality up-to-date material was being entered. Mr Cornick and Information Services would be taking this work forward. Editorial control would be needed to ensure consistency, considering such material as Ministerial soundbites, major events, briefing material, good-news stories, and the positive presentation of security issues. The RUC, as well as developing its own independent entry, would provide material, as would the Army. Brigadier Strudley stressed that in providing material it would be important to bear in mind what the Government was trying to achieve and get the balance right. Dedicated resources might be required and possibly the formation of a committee to take the work forward.

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Mr Steele welcomed the initiative of Information Services and felt that this was the correct place for the work to be taken forward. He accepted that dedicated resources might be required and Brigadier Strudley indicated that if necessary the resource question would also be addressed by the MOD. It was noted that PCC would also be considering this issue at its next meeting scheduled for the end of April/beginning of May.

5. KNOWN MEDIA PLANS

a) NIO

The Secretary of State would be making a speech on 3 April at Trinity College, Dublin, and on 5 April would be flagging away competitors at the start of the 1996 Circuit of Ireland Rally in Bangor. Lord Lloyd was expected to return to Northern Ireland to continue work on the enquiry into legislation against terrorism, proceeding on the basis of what would be necessary if there was a return to normality.

b) RUC

The BBC was expected to broadcast an item on parades; work was continuing on combating the problem of drugs and the RUC had placed advertisements in some newspapers in the Londonderry area; and the Irish Times was considering producing an article on policing which would feature some recruits.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

NORTHERN IRELAND OVERSEAS INFORMATION COMMITTEE (NIOIC)

NORTHERN IRELAND STRATEGIC INFORMATION LIAISON COMMITTEE (SILC)

Brigadier Strudley raised the question of MOD attendance at NIOIC and SILC. It was noted that the overseas information effort was primarily based on political and economic issues (which did not indicate a lack of interest in the security information effort) and Mr Steele/Mr Perry had recently been refused membership of NIOIC.

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Brigadier Strudley made the point that NIO and FCO activities should include security and armed forces issues, especially as 20% of the deployed assets of the Army were in Northern Ireland. The Army had also previously provided information as material for a Greyband, but this had not been progressed. Mr Cornick agreed to pursue these points with the NIOIC/SILC Secretariat. If the ceasefire was not restored and the IRA returned to full-scale operations, Mr Steele would also be returning to the question of the future role of SIG and the additional staff which would be required to set up a dedicated security information unit.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of SIG will be held on Wednesday 1 May 1996 at 3.00 pm in Stormont House Conference Room.

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